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Emperors, Prostitutes, and Children: Exploring Modern Japanese History Through Two Modern Japanese Plays

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**EMPERORS, PROSTITUTES, AND CHILDREN: EXPLORING MODERN
JAPANESE HISTORY THROUGH TWO MODERN JAPANESE PLAYS**

by

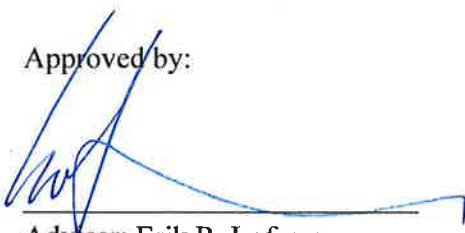
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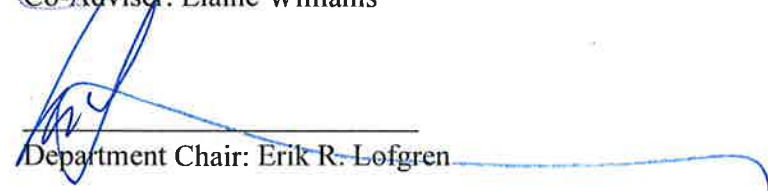
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ABSTRACT

“Theatre,” asserts Japanese playwright Betsuyaku Minoru, “mirrors the spirit of the times.” Building on this assumption, this thesis analyzes how the pressing social issues of two periods in modern Japanese history are reflected in two modern Japanese plays: *The Little Match Girl* (*Macchi uri no shōjo*, 1966) by Betsuyaku Minoru (b. 1937) and *The King of La Mancha’s Clothes* (*Gusha ni wa mienai La Mancha no ōsama no hadaka*, 1991) by Yokouchi Kensuke (b. 1961). Both plays provide meaningful commentary on the themes of patriarchal authority, prostitution, and inter-generational conflict through combining “contemporary” Japanese characters with Hans Christian Andersen Fairy Tales. Using this strategy, the plays closely and creatively reflect the issues of their historical periods, yet also tell their stories in an ahistorical way. By means of language, imagery, and fairy tale allusions, both plays illuminate the cyclical nature of time, and the tendency to perceive history as repeating itself.

Modern Japanese theatre is a rich, diverse, and often-overlooked genre. I argue that these two modern Japanese plays are worthy of greater attention as they, through so closely reflecting the issues of their specific time periods, also have broader relevance to other time periods as well. Thus, I end with an argument for the potential these plays would have to spark profound reflection and discussion around various social issues, if they were today performed in the United States or other nations outside Japan.

Key words: Japanese theatre, 60s Japan, 90s Japan, Japanese prostitution, Japanese patriarchy, Japanese generational conflict, cyclical time, Hans Christian Andersen in Japan,

INTRODUCTION: THE STAGE AS A MIRROR OF THE TIMES

“...to hold, as ‘twere, the
mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature,
scorn her own image, and the very age and body of
the time his form and pressure.”

- William Shakespeare; *Hamlet*; Act III, Scene 2

“Theatre mirrors the spirit of the times”

- Betsuyaku Minoru; *Half a Century of Japanese Theatre: 1980s Part 1*; ix

Japan has undergone tremendous change in the last century. There exists no other case quite like it. Japan is the only nation to have suffered full-scale nuclear warfare against its civilians. It is the only nation whose imperial line stretches back, unbroken, from the beginning of its recorded to history to today. It is one of the few nations to achieve, albeit briefly, the position of number one world economic power. It is one of the few nations to have (at least for a time) turned almost completely away from war and militarism. And it is perhaps the only nation to have spent over two of the last of the last four centuries in near-total isolation. From fascism to democracy, from emperor-worship to consumerism, from militarism to pacifism, from pauperism to prosperity, from ultra-nationalism to globalization, and from tradition to innovation, significant upheavals have repeatedly changed the face Japanese society over the course of the last century.

In a society of dramatic change, can the dramatic arts stay static? Can theatre artists hold a “mirror” up the “nature” of a “rapidly changing society” (Rimer ix), using only well-established, unchanging forms, texts, and styles? This seems hardly likely.

Theatre created in the past century of Japanese history must therefore be worthy of special attention.

Why is it then, that “Western scholarly attention to modern Japanese theatre has been eclipsed by the attention paid to the traditional theatres” (Wetmore Jr. 182)? English-language scholarship and popular knowledge of Japanese theatre has focused primarily on either indigenous classical forms or, less commonly, overt adaptations of Western theatre (i.e. Broadway musicals). “Contemporary Japanese playwriting,” theatre that was originally written in Japanese, but not in a several-hundred-years-old style, “remains relatively unknown in Europe and America” (Wetmore Jr. 181). In this way, the new creative accomplishments of Japanese theatre artists throughout this century of turbulent change are mostly-untranslated, and even when translated, mostly-ignored by the international community. All this while “the stages of Tokyo (professional, amateur, and academic) often present both classical Western texts and the latest plays from Europe and America in translation” (Wetmore Jr. 181).

Japanese civilization boasts a rich legacy of theatrical tradition that stretches back to centuries before Commodore Perry arrived in 1854. Japanese traditional performing arts have a “comparatively long history even within world theatre” and the traditional forms of *noh*, *kabuki*, *kyōgen*, and *bunraku* are still performed today (Uchida 1). *Noh* is, in fact, the “oldest surviving theatre tradition in practice” (Swed). Today’s companies still often stage plays of the twelfth century playwright Zeami, the form’s most iconic figure (Swed). Considering its long history, *noh* and other pre-19th century forms are understandably the subject of significant Western scholarship. But why does the popular focus on classical theatre come alongside a popular disregard for modern theatre? Much

of the scholarship on Japanese theatre might lead the reader to “think innovation in the Japanese theatre ended with the Meiji restoration” in 1868 despite significant evidence to the contrary (Jortner 311).

This focus on only classical theatre is part of a larger tendency to perceive Japanese history in a “binary format: prewar/Third World and postwar/New American” (Jortner 311). This constructed binary that artificially separates traditional theatre from continuing innovation came largely as the result of a historical political agenda. Following the end of World War II, a number of scholars became “uncritical apologists for Japan” (Jortner 311). They sought to redeem its international image from the feudal and backwards appearance painted by wartime propaganda. They gained greater support as the Cold War escalated and Americans began to see Japan as a strategic foothold in Asia. In order for popular Western perceptions of Japan to change, however, a clear line had to be drawn between the Japan that fought World War II and the Japan of the post-war period. To this purpose, customs that had “been so recently understood as burdensome feudal practices” were re-cast as innocuous ancient “tradition” so that they could continue without condemnation (Jortner 311). As a consequence, classical theatre was “trapped” in this new identity. Recognition of it would henceforth focus primarily on it as an ancient tradition, rather than a living and changing art form (Jortner 311).

The enshrinement of classical theatre “tradition” also meant that it soon eclipsed and obscured “any mention of the new forms” theatre would take (Jortner 311). Thus, except for the significant efforts of a handful of scholars, artists, and enthusiasts, a century of Japanese theatre has barely left Japan. A number of translations have been

produced and a number of books sit mostly-forgotten in university libraries.¹ Even when scholarly attention does exist, the actual theatrical production of modern Japanese drama in Western theatres is “virtually unheard of” (Wetmore Jr. 181).

The conviction that modern Japanese drama is worthy of greater scholarly and artistic attention runs throughout this thesis. My personal connection to this conviction results largely from my experience as a student in Kyoto in 2015 and 2016, where I was able to attend a number of performances by modern Japanese theatre artists. From both these impactful experiences and corresponding further research came the impetus to write a thesis on this genre of theatre. In the following chapters, I thus examine two works of modern Japanese drama, one from the 1960s and one from the 1990s. In the first two chapters, I analyze the ways in which they reflect and comment on their historical time periods. In the third chapter, I find commonalities between them, especially regarding the theme of cyclical time. I argue that these plays not only reflect “the spirit of the times” when they were created, but also reflect broader, cyclical and continuous themes in Japanese history. These themes are: patriarchal authority (especially involving the emperor), prostitution (specifically, female prostitution in its many various forms), and inter-generational issues (especially involving children). These themes are, moreover, not unique to Japan. Japan has undergone tremendous change in the past century, and these two plays from different decades both reflect this change and reveal that despite it, certain historical patterns recur and certain social forces stay constant. Both plays, through closely reflecting their own respective time periods, reflect universal issues and

¹ For example: one book I borrowed to write this thesis had been published two decades ago and never once checked out.

therefore have “relevance for us all” (Goodman 24). This thesis ends with an appeal for their performance in the United States and other nations.

To contextualize this thesis, I provide in this introduction an abridged summary of general trends in modern Japanese theatre. The purpose of this is to illuminate the broad artistic context that frames the two plays studied. I also briefly summarize some of the ways in which the dramatic stage has repeatedly historically functioned as a battleground for competing ideologies, aesthetics, and visions of Japanese national identity and the nation’s future. I then explain the reason for the selection of the two specific plays discussed in this thesis: *The Little Match Girl* (*Macchi uri no shōjo*, 1966) by Betsuyaku Minoru² (b. 1937) and *The King of La Mancha’s Clothes* (*Gusha ni wa mienai La Mancha no ōsama no hadaka*, 1991) by Yokouchi Kensuke (b. 1961). Lastly, I give a brief overview of each chapter of the thesis.

A Brief History of Modern Japanese Theatre

When Japan opened to the West in 1854, so did Japanese theatre. The Meiji Period (1868–1912) saw the birth of two new types of theatre: *shinpa* (“new school”) and *shingeki* (“new theatre”) (Tsuboike). Of these two, *shingeki* has proved the most popular, the most influential and, for our purposes, the most important. With this sudden diversification, the question of what aesthetics, content, message, and organizational structure Japanese theatre should assume took on multicultural and controversial dimensions. Would Japanese theatre artists continue along the path of the already-

² Japanese names will, in this thesis, be written according to the Japanese format: family name first, then given name second.

matured *kabuki*, *noh*, *kyōgen*, and *bunraku* forms? Would they adopt Western theatrical techniques? Or would they invent new alternatives? And if so, would those alternatives prove themselves to have lasting artistic merit?

In the end, all of these three of these (continuity, adoption, and invention) occurred. *Shingeki* is characterized primarily by adoption of Western theatrical plays and techniques. The movement opened a bold new historical chapter, developing “not as an extension of traditional Japanese theatre forms but through a rupture with them” (Goodman 4). *Shingeki* practitioners focused on staging works by Western playwrights such as Ibsen, Chekhov and Strindberg, through whose production they felt they could “modernize theater” (Uchida 1). They rejected the elaborate physicality, fanciful costumes, and mythological stories of *kabuki* and *noh* as “irrationality” (Goodman 4). Instead, they learned to master the style of Western realism and the acting methods of the Moscow Art Theatre (Powell 153). The work of Russian playwright Anton Chekhov, for instance, was so often performed that he was “regarded as virtually a Japanese playwright” (Powell 153). One major figure in *shingeki*, Osanai Kaoru, was so “thoroughly disillusioned with the state of Japanese theatre” (Powell 60) that, for a time, he vowed only to produce translated Western plays (Uchida 1). He and his colleagues made it their mission, in Osanai’s own words, to “wage war on this tradition [of classical theatre]” and to “create our own distinct theatre art, new and free” (Goodman 6). Thus, theatre became a battleground for the creation of a “new and free” national identity for Japanese art and artists.

Shingeki’s commitment to “wage war” on Japanese tradition and instead emulate the West had potential political implications. To add to this, many practitioners saw

Marxism as the philosophy to “modernize” the whole of Japanese society in the same way that they were “modernizing” its theatre. Consequently, *shingeki* developed and grew more and more associated with political leftism throughout the Meiji and Taishō (1912–1926) periods only to find itself attacked by fascist authorities during the 1930s. During World War II, many *shingeki* artists were arrested and those theatre companies that did not switch ideological positions and begin producing nationalist plays were forced to cease operation (Uchida 2; Powell 115).

Shingeki was persecuted during the war not only because of its leftist leanings, but also because of its Western leanings. Iizuka Tomoichirō (1894–1983), a wartime nationalist theatre critic, ridiculed *shingeki*’s focus on the West as un-patriotic and unbecoming of Japan’s future. In doing this, he ironically affirmed a similar notion to that held by Osanai: that “theatre should reflect the national spirit” (Powell 117). Iizuka, interestingly enough, also rejected the traditional forms. His concern adumbrated one that would overtake Japan in the 1960s: “that drama might not change quickly enough to reflect the shift in national consciousness” (Powell 118).

The war ended, the militarists lost, and *shingeki* artists left prison and euphorically entered a new Japan where authorities permitted them to put on openly socialist plays (Powell 137). Intriguingly, the Allied occupation did not free all theatre artists equally: *kabuki*, used during the war as nationalist propaganda, came under close surveillance and censorship following Japan’s surrender (Powell 143–44). *Shingeki* too soon fell from favor, as the red scare prompted another crack-down on communists and socialists (Powell 143).

Once again, in the post-war era, Japanese theatre became a battleground for national identity and the direction of its future development. In 1948, Allied authorities summoned *shingeki* artists together to listen to a reading of the Japanese translation of Thornton Wilder's *The Skin of our Teeth* with the hopes that it would inspire them to produce it and other American plays. Authorities also attempted to change the hierarchy of the *shingeki* world and impose a more "American" producer system. Neither attempt met with much success (Powell 142–43). Both affirmed, however, that, while regimes may rise and fall, all are determined that theatre should "mirror the spirit of the times" in ways that reinforce their agenda.

In the 60s, theatrical activity took a new turn. It was then that Japanese theatre artists were able, through extensive, frenzied, diversified, and decentralized activity, to finally launch a lasting and original movement in the history of theatre. Different scholars refer to this movement with different names: "*angura*" (short for "underground"), "post-*shingeki*", or the "little theatre movement" (Uchida 3; Goodman 24; Tsuboike). The various strands of this decentralized movement were united in a rejection of *shingeki* as vehement as *shingeki*'s rejection of classical theatre had been. Many of the pioneers of this 60s movement were those who had at first been fascinated by *shingeki*, only to become disillusioned with its obsession with translated Western plays and its overt political leanings. Some called *shingeki* a kind of "measles", something you catch once then become immune to. So widespread was this rejection that "despising *shingeki* became an established pose of the intellectual" (Uchida 2).

Rejection of *shingeki* meant rejection of nearly every one of its aspects. The privileging of text was replaced by the privileging of body. Naturalistic acting styles

made way for more presentational methods. Logical dramas lost ground to absurd ones. Stories about ordinary people fell out of style, and those about gods and demons came into style. Plays that championed modernism and science were displaced by ghost stories. Realistic dramaturgy gave way to grotesque, nightmarish amalgamations of seemingly disconnected characters and situations. Even the proscenium arch, the traditional architectural that frames Western performance, was rejected by companies that performed in tents and on the streets (Uchida 3; Goodman 19–22). A highly influential playwright and director from this period, Terayama Shūji, effectively epitomized much of the spirit of the 60s in his manifesto,³ where he states: “theatre is chaos” (1).

Once again, chaos or no, theatre was a battleground for Japanese identity. In many ways, Japanese theatre in the 60s and beyond harked back to classical Japanese theatre, revitalizing the myths, ghosts, non-realistic acting styles, and non-Western dramaturgy of the premodern past. It was, however, not “atavistic” but “dialectical”, also drawing on Western influences. Beckett, absurdism, Marxism, Christianity, and even *shingeki* all had profound impacts on theatre from the 60s forward (Goodman 15). The movement, therefore, reflected a new phase in Japan’s history, one of neither isolationism nor unabashed Westernization. Instead, it sought to combine foreign influences, domestic tradition, and radical experimentation to form something new.

This movement embraced highly-critical and existential self-examination from its very beginnings. Failure in World War II had discredited previous guiding ideologies that provided a sense of identity and purpose to Japanese people. Following the war, the failure of massive nationwide student protests to stop the highly controversial 1960

³ Terayama’s playful, chaotic, and experimental philosophy of theatre is clear in the formatting of his manifesto: many of the words are blocked out by a large picture of him printed on top of it.

renewal of the US-Japan Security Treaty (often abbreviated to *anpo*) prompted another loss of faith, this time in the leftist political ideas and institutions that had inspired so many of Japan's youth. The theatre of the 60s rose out of this existential confusion, asking questions such as: "henceforth, what should the Japanese live and die for?" (Goodman 19). The changes Japanese theatre underwent in this decade and beyond were, therefore, not a mere aesthetic fad, but an effort to "revolutionize what it means to be Japanese" (Goodman 16).

The legacy of the 60s continues today, carried on by artists, who, decade after decade, further "radicalized the 'quest for identity'" (Uchida 5). The late 80s and 90s, however, saw another theatrical revolution, albeit a less spectacular one. This was the movement away from sensationally epic and shockingly grotesque theatricality and towards the more tightly-knit plots, "realistic" acting, and more understated aesthetics of a newly-invented genre known as "quiet theatre" (Uchida 10). Much of the theatre of the 60s, 70s, and 80s was famous for "foregrounding eccentric forms, bold acting, and the screaming out of lines" (Uchida 9). The popular perception, however, soon turned against this aesthetic. Artists realized that companies that "tried to be unique in expression" by out-competing each other in absurdity and grotesqueness "quickly became commonplace" (Uchida 9).

Yokouchi Kensuke, a playwright from this generation (and the author of one of the plays examined here) explains that "the revolutionary period of the little theatre movement has ended. Our role is to engage in the steady building of the nation. Swinging around swords and guns is exciting, but we have to till the land with ploughs and hoes" (Uchida 9). He and others thus began to espouse more orthodox dramaturgy in order to

“engage in the steady building of the nation” of Japan and its theatre. Thus, time and time again, “theatre mirrors the spirit of the times,” and those who create theatre are animated by an “intense urgency” to continuously redefine how theatre reflects the nation and, thereby, how the nation sees itself. (Goodman 23).

Why These Two Plays?

Modern Japanese theatre has “far-reaching implications for us all” (Goodman 24). It may specifically concern Japanese society, but it deals with universal themes. Three such themes are patriarchal authority, prostitution, and inter-generational conflict. Patriarchal authority, whether it be of the Emperor, the Father, the Teacher, the Prime Minister, or the Businessman (or “Salaryman”), is an important theme in both Japanese society and many others. Prostitution is another theme that is both Japanese and universal. Prostitution here is defined broadly, as the many forms in which the female body is commodified and consumed, and the lingering effects these have on both the consumed and the consumer. A third theme is that of inter-generational conflict: parents in conflict with children, students in conflict with teachers, or youth in conflict with adults. The social significance of generations in Japan is seen in the fact that different generations are given different names such as *senzen-ha* (“prewar faction”), *taiyōzoku* (“sun tribe”), or, most dramatically, *shinjinrui* (“new human species”). “Stereotyping generations” in this way is, however, “not a unique Japanese pastime” (Fields 13). Those in the United States may be familiar with the naming of generations, such as “baby boomers”, “generation X” or “millennials”.

The two plays I have selected to focus on in this thesis both clearly exemplify all three of these themes. In each, there is a patriarchal authority, often associated with the emperor. In each, there is a character who either has prostituted herself or who is currently prostituting herself. In each, one of the primary conflicts is between the older generation and the younger generation.

Cyclical time is another important issue I identify within both plays. Viewed together, the plays also form a larger image of cyclical time, as one play, written almost three decades after the other, displays many of the same themes as the first. If “theatre mirrors the spirit of the times” then this means that the two time periods, despite their differences, had remarkably similar spirits.

It would be impossible to label these two plays and playwrights as being “the most important” among the huge canon that comprises modern Japanese theatre. They are both, however, clearly noteworthy examples. Both plays have both received the prestigious Kishida Kunio Drama Award and their authors are both important figures (Osamu 181; “Artist Interview: Minoru Betsuyaku”). Betsuyaku has “laid the foundation” for the theatre of the absurd in Japan and served as president of the Japan Playwright’s Association for many years (“Artist Interview: Minoru Betsuyaku”; Japan Playwrights Association ix). Yokouchi is an influential playwright who today continues to lead the “Theatre of Doorways” (*Tobira-za*) theatre company (Osamu 181). Both were educated at Tokyo’s Waseda University, a highly-competitive private university and a breeding ground of theatrical experimentation and collaboration from the 60s onwards (Osamu 180; “Artist Interview: Minoru Betsuyaku”). The two plays studied here are, moreover, among the handful of modern Japanese plays given the distinction of being

translated and published in English-language anthologies. Modern Japanese drama is diverse and it would be impossible to distill it down to any two playwrights, much less any two plays. Nevertheless, these two plays are notable examples of it.

The additional reason that I have selected these two particular plays is because they both make use of a remarkably similar dramatic framing device: the blending of an original story with a Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale. *The Little Match Girl* clearly and consciously acknowledges, evokes, and re-invents the eponymous fairy tale. *The King of La Mancha's Clothes* re-purposes the characters and plot elements of *The Emperor's New Clothes*. Yokouchi does not stop there, however, and his play also draws heavily on *Don Quixote* and, to a lesser extent, on *King Lear*.

The plays are not, however, simple re-tellings or “modernizations” of fairy tales. They are original stories reflecting and addressing pressing Japanese social questions at the time of their creation. The way that they reflect these social concerns happens to be through re-purposing a fairy tale. Both playwrights are, paradoxically, able to discuss very real and painful issues of contemporary Japanese society so honestly precisely because they connect and blend them with an archaic foreign fantasy to which they seemingly bear no relation. Betsuyaku uses the “rich texture of a fairy tale” to create an “absurd space” in which painful memories can be evoked and serious critiques presented (Rolf 16–17). Yokouchi, similarly, is only able to fully show his “frustrations” with current norms through creating “characters who cannot exist in contemporary Japanese society” (Osamu 181).

These playwrights did not invent this strategy of distancing the dramatic setting from the audience in order to discuss a deeply intimate topic more safely and effectively.

They simply use this strategy in a very particular way. Presenting contemporary social critiques by evoking the past is a long tradition in Japanese theatre. Perhaps the most notable example is that of the renowned classic kabuki play *Kanadehon chūshingura* (“Treasury of Loyal Retainers”). It was first performed as a puppet play in Osaka in 1748 before being quickly reproduced on the *kabuki* stage, where it is still often performed today. The setting of the story is the fourteenth-century and the plot is taken from the medieval warrior epic *Taiheiki* (“Chronicle of Great Peace”). The actual subject of the play, however, is an eighteenth century violent political scandal known as the Akō Incident (Foxwell 22–23). In the play, Lord Asano from the Akō Incident appears as Enya Hangan and his nemesis, Lord Kira, is “transformed” into the Ashikaga shogunal official Kō no Moranoa (Foxwell 24).

In this way, both of the most important “contemporary” (Edo-period) characters from the eighteenth-century incident are superimposed onto the molds of historical characters from the fourteenth century. The reason for this was that it allowed the playwrights to address “forbidden topics” (Foxwell 23). The Edo Period was a time of strict authoritarian government censorship of the arts, especially theatre. The writers of *Kanadehon chūshingura*, however, were able to circumvent censors even while discussing a highly controversial topic by placing it in the context of the distant past (Foxwell 33). The power of *Kanadehon chūshingura* to comment on contemporary reality did not, moreover, end in the eighteenth century. The play is a revenge tale, and its performance was banned by Allied authorities following the end of the Second World War precisely because it was still too relevant. Authorities feared that it would encourage “feudal” sentiments (Powell 136).

Japanese playwrights are not the only ones to use stories of seemingly distant people and places in order to talk about those controversially close to home. An examination of Shakespeare's plays reveals that most of them are set either in other parts of Europe, or in England's past. *Macbeth*, for example, presents a very serious critique of tyrannical kingship by placing it in Scotland. Had Shakespeare portrayed a "contemporary" English monarch as a bloodthirsty and ambitious murderer, the consequences would likely have been similar to those of a *kabuki* playwright foolish enough to directly criticize the Shōgunate.

Even in cases where censorship is not an issue, placing contemporary problems in distant contexts is still a popular dramatic strategy for dealing with topics that evoke pain and controversy. "Theater of War", for example, is a currently-active American theatre company that has presented hundreds of readings of ancient Greek tragedies for US military combat veterans in order to stimulate discussions about PTSD. The company is founded on the idea that plays written in Greece over two-thousand years ago are capable of "illuminating the moral and spiritual dimensions of trauma and loss" for 21st century American soldiers (Doerries 8). It is precisely because they reach out to audiences from ages and centuries away, the company director holds, that Greek tragedies are effective conversation-starters. Placing PTSD in the temporally and culturally distant context of ancient Greece is paradoxically the most effective way of opening up a discussion about it. *The Little Match Girl* and *The King of La Mancha's Clothes*, while they do not directly connect to PTSD or ancient Greece, make use of a similar strategy. Both playwrights blend contemporary and local social issues with culturally and temporally distant folk tales in order to facilitate more open discussion.

A Brief Overview of this Thesis

In the first chapter of this thesis, I focus primarily on *The Little Match Girl* and its historical context: the occupation era (1945–1952), the 50s, and the 60s. I center on the actions of identity presentation and of rejection, connecting the actions and words of various characters to the themes of cultural nationalism, the abandonment of war orphans, and the repeated institutionalization of comfort women. Altogether, I illuminate how *The Little Match Girl* provides a compelling picture of the ways in which “the affluent veneer that Japan had acquired in the 1960s could not erase the stark images of the 1940s lodged in the memories of the Japanese of all ages who had lived through those years” (Rolf 17).

In the second chapter of this thesis, I examine the connections between *The King of La Mancha’s Clothes* and its historical context of the high-growth era⁴ and the 90s. I organize my discussion around two motifs that appear in the play: clothing and nakedness. Both of these converge with a focus on the Japanese education system during the period: its international image, its rules and policies, its problems, and its unfortunate indirect connection with the Japanese sex industry. Yokouchi’s play reflects a range of far-reaching social trends from the period: especially the materialism that can underlie both economic growth and sexual exploitation.

In the third chapter, I connect both plays through the concept of cyclical time. I argue that cyclical time manifests itself both *within* and *between* the plays. I analyze how each play creates a sense of ahistorical reality, and how this parallels a sense of repetitiveness within actual Japanese history. When viewed together, moreover, the many similarities between the plays imply an overarching sense of cyclical time. Despite the

⁴ “High growth era” refers here to the period from the late 60s through the early 90s.

historical changes between the 60s and 90s, patriarchal (and imperial) authority, prostitution, and inter-generational conflict are themes in both.

“Theatre,” Betsuyaku and Shakespeare both posit in different words, “reflects the spirit of the times.” I have here introduced modern Japanese theatre, argued for greater academic and artistic attention towards it, and put forth *The Little Match Girl* and *The King of La Mancha's Clothes* as two modern Japanese plays that reflect the “spirit” of their respective time periods. Throughout the remaining chapters I explore this and encourage reflection on a question that I will return to in the conclusion, where I will supplement its discussion with relevant personal experience as a theatre artist: how could these plays also reflect the “spirit” of *our* time?

CHAPTER 1: *THE LITTLE MATCH GIRL* AND THE GHOSTS OF THE OCCUPATION

The Little Match Girl is a 1966 play by Betsuyaku Minoru. Lights come up on an older couple named “Man” and “Wife” fuss comically around a table, ritualistically engaging in their “daily convention” of serving tea (Kraly 18). Soon, however, a young woman (“Woman”) visits them. The young woman begins telling a story about how she read the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale of *The Little Match Girl*,⁵ then realized it was about her own childhood. She then reveals that, as a child, she not only sold matches, she also lifted her skirt while they burned; in reality, “it was not the matches being sold, it was the girl” (Kraly 16). Even more surprising, she claims the older couple are her parents according to the records at city hall. The older couple respond in shock, and the situation escalates further as the younger woman summons in, first, her younger brother (“Brother”), then, her own two young children. The action turns progressively darker, and forms a deeper and deeper indictment of the older couple’s past mistreatment and rejection of their children. Just before the end of the play, however, the younger woman’s two young children stop breathing in their sleep from the cold. This raises the question of whether the younger woman has neglected her children in the same way she was neglected by her parents. Interlaced throughout the performance are voiceovers that tell a modified version of the Hans Christian Andersen tale from which the play takes its name.

⁵ A story about a poor, orphaned girl who sells matches in the street. One bitterly cold night, when she has not managed so sell a single match, she freezes to death. She is found, in the morning, clutching a handful of matches she had lit trying to warm herself. Despite the tragic ending, the original story has a positive Christian moral, as the little girl is summoned up to heaven to join her deceased mother upon her death (Kraly 16, 21).

I will analyze the complex interconnections between this play and Japanese society during the 60s, when the play was written. The 60s was a time when Japan was beginning to recover from the intense economic and social degradation of the immediate postwar years. While some were anxious to move on and claim a new identity for the nation, others felt that the ghosts of wartime and occupation suffering still lingered. *Betsuyaku* belongs to the second group, and the play artfully excavates many painful memories of the US occupation of Japan (1945–1952) and juxtaposes them with the 60s-era desire to “forget everything. Without exception!” (38; 17).⁶ I thus group my analysis of the connections between the play and the time period into two categories: those dealing with the careful construction and presentation of identity, and those dealing with rejection of past sins and their present incarnations.

Identity Presentation: Introduction

“Why, to sum it all up, are we us?” ask the characters named “Man and “Wife” in *The Little Match Girl* (31; 10). In the original Japanese, the words used for “we” and “us” are the same pronoun (*wareware*);⁷ however, the first *wareware* (“we”) is written in *kanji* (logographic Chinese characters), and the second *wareware* (“us”) is written in phonetic *katakana* characters, which are sometimes used in Japanese to add emphasis or abstraction. Another possible translation that captures these nuances might thus be:

⁶ I will be citing the following editions of the plays using the following format: (English page number; Japanese page number). English edition used: *Betsuyaku*, Minoru. “The Little Match Girl.” *Alternative Japanese Drama: Ten Plays*. Edited by Robert T. Rolf and John K. Gillespie, Translated by Robert T. Rolf, U of Hawaii P, 1992. Print. Japanese edition used: *Betsuyaku* Minoru. *Matchi-uri no shōjo; zō: Betsuyaku Minoru gikyoku shū*. Ichi Shobō, 1969. Print.

⁷ This word can be spelled with two different sets of *kanji*, and thus, to clarify, the one that appears in the script is: 我々 (10).

“What exactly makes us *us*?” This question could be a self-reflective one. Its context within the scene, however, speaks to another interpretation. The character who asks the question is talking to a virtual stranger, and is concluding a list of his and his wife’s various unique character qualities. This questioning of one’s identity is, therefore, an exercise in an action the play is replete with: self representation. In this line of dialogue, the speaker is subtly encouraging others to ask, “What exactly makes you *you*?”

Many of the characters in *The Little Match Girl* display a preoccupation with who they are, and, more importantly, how others see them. This parallels a similar fixation on image seen in trends within Japanese culture and discourse following the end of the Second World War. This is unsurprising, considering the character of such a catastrophic war, the loss of which called upon the whole nation to redefine the way that it presented itself on the international stage. Three important themes of Japan’s postwar reconstruction of its identity and image are: uniqueness, in-betweenness, and good citizenship. Betsuyaku weaves these themes into the actions of characters in his play, thereby encourage audience reflection on them. Ultimately, Betsuyaku shows that ghosts of Japan’s painful past still linger, and it is disingenuous to present an image of the nation that denies this.

Identity Presentation: Uniqueness

The characters who ask “Why, to sum it all up, are we *us*?” are an older couple on whose bickering and fastidious, ritualistic table-setting the play opens. In the course of the play, they are visited by a young woman who reveals that she has come from the direction of city hall. Because of this, the older couple are suspicious she was sent from city hall to gather information on them, but are too polite to initially ask her directly.

They therefore proceed to put on an extravagant performance to welcome her. They insist, to the point of comical excess, on making her comfortable. The couple's extreme hospitality soon betrays itself to be, in reality, a thinly-veiled obsession with presenting a positive image of themselves. They prattle on that it is their "established policy never to disappoint anyone who has come so far" (31; 10), thereby concealing self-advertisement in what sounds like a welcome to their guest.

One of the topics they expound upon is their own uniqueness and exemplary character. They "aren't rich" but "try not to be unnecessarily frugal" (31; 9). They comment that "the city tax isn't much" but that they "pay it right no time" (31; 9). They "don't drink too much water" (31; 9) and "always like to help those less fortunate as much as [they] can" because "that's [their] way" (32; 10). Their desperation to declare their own utter innocuousness and non-offensiveness is most obvious in their somewhat perplexing claim that "our ideas are moderate too. We are both, relatively speaking, Progressive Conservatives" (31; 9). They conclude the discourse on their own uniqueness with a number of questions:

Why are we so healthy in spite of growing old? Why are we so cheerful? So full of humor? Why, though we aren't rich, are we not unnecessarily frugal? How can we be both progressive and conservative at the same time? Why are we such good citizens? Why, to sum it all up, are we us? (31; 10)

The hosts, therefore, construct an image of themselves as possessing a unique and flawless character.

If "theatre mirrors the spirit of the time" then this leads to the question: who else during this period was constructing an image of themselves as unique and flawless? Igarashi Yoshikuni provides an answer: the whole Japanese nation. The idea that "Japan

is unique” has surfaced at different points in Japan’s postwar history. Perhaps the most well-known example is that of *Nihonjinron*, a form of cultural theorizing that became prominent during the 70s and 80s and was infamous for its “totalizing, essentialist claims regarding the unique quality of Japanese culture” and its goal of distinguishing “the Japanese from all other peoples” (Igarashi 73). These nationalist ideas that formed the core of *nihonjinron* did not, however, originate in the 70s and 80s, but stretched further back to past decades. Thus, all throughout Japanese postwar history, claims to Japanese uniqueness have been often intimately and subtly linked with Japanese cultural nationalism.

Nationalism and claims to Japanese superiority in the political realm were clearly debunked by Japan’s loss of the war. Political nationalism continued to be impractical under the United States–Japan Security Treaty, which defined Japan as dependent on the US for military help. Culture was, thus, the “dominant area of nationalistic discourse in postwar Japan” (Igarashi 73). Essentialist claims to the “uniqueness” of Japanese culture functioned “as an ideological device to assure the superior status of Japan in relations with other countries” (Igarashi 73). This trend on the part of Japanese society as a whole is mirrored in microcosm by the actions of the older couple and their obsession with proving their own “unique” identity.

Claims that the Japanese “character” or “culture” possessed an inherent uniqueness and superiority grew louder as Japan’s economy began to revive, a process that escalated in the 60s. Technology, soon to emerge as a powerful industry, became a repository for nationalism. Some claimed that “‘world leadership’ in technology was an expression of Japanese culture” (Yoshimi 162). Cultural nationalism was so prevalent

that advertisers capitalized on it (and thereby encouraged it), through claims such as that “Japanese colour can only be expressed by a Japanese colour television” (Yoshimi 162).

Identity Presentation: In-Betweenness

While the older couple in *The Little Match Girl* do not boast about technology, they do boast of their perfect character and, in specific, their “in-betweenness”. They make a point of emphasizing their neutrality between any extreme positions, for example: being rich or “unnecessarily frugal”, being overly politically progressive or overly politically conservative, or being good at too many things or not good at anything (34; 12).

The practice of situating oneself in the middle between two undesirable extremes parallels the growing “use of *chū* (middle, in between) as a trope” in discourse on Japanese national identity during the 50s (Igarashi 79). During this period, sociologists and cultural theorists such as Katō Shūichi, Katō Norihiro, and Maruyama Masao published works that focused on this concept of Japanese hybridity and “middle-ness”. Often, they presented current Japanese society as a middle-ground between indigenous Japanese roots and adopted foreign elements, or, more broadly, between Asia and the West (Igarashi 79–80). The Japanese discourse situating the nation in the “middle ground”, just like the older couple’s conversation, extended to political concerns. “Neutrality (*chūritsu*) was an attractive position to many liberal intellectuals” who wished to transcend the global political polarization of the Cold War (Igarashi 79). Their appeals grew louder, rather than softer, as Japan became deeper and deeper incorporated into the American camp.

These emphases on hybridity and in-betweenness “were deployed to confirm the unique position of Japanese culture and Japan in relation to other nations” (Igarashi 9). This was done through conceptualizing Japan “as a third term that defied the very premise of the binary opposition” of the categories (i.e. East vs. West) ascribed to other nations (Igarashi 79). This transcendence of borders is also apparent in the discussion of Japanese technology. In the 60s and beyond, Japan acquired the image of a high-technology country, an image that had previously been associated exclusively with the West. In doing so, it acquired “elements that have been regarded by the ‘West’ as something of its essence” and thereby to upset the “borderline between the ‘modern/West’ and the ‘premodern/East’” (Yoshimi 151). Thus, by emphasizing moderation and in-betweenness, both Japan and the older couple imply their own uniqueness, and, therefore, superiority.

Identity Presentation: Good Citizenship

The older couple makes one more important claim: that they are “good citizens”. They first go into detail, questioning their visitor to ascertain how they are thought of at city hall (as they assume she is privy to some information from authorities). Once the younger woman validates that they are good citizens, they ask if they are exemplary citizens. When this too is validated, they ask if they are harmless citizens (30–31; 9). After all three claims are confirmed, the man clarifies this choice of terms:

Last year, the mayor went out on the balcony and gave a speech. Then, at the end, he said, “In our city we are pleased to have 362 citizens who are not only good, and exemplary, but also harmless.” Those last two are us...really. (31; 9)

How does this preoccupation with appearing “good”, “exemplary”, and “harmless” reflect large-scale trends in Japanese society during the period?

The quest to construct an image of oneself as a “good citizen” resonates with a historical event that occurred only two years prior to the play’s premier: the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. This event was of such monumental importance to the nation’s international presence that Japanologist George Fields even claimed that “Japan opened with the Tokyo Olympics, not with Commodore Perry” (9). This is because this high-profile event, the first Olympics ever to be held in Japan, “symbolized the full acceptance of Japan back into the international community and marked Japan’s future path” (Igarashi 143). Fields described his visit to Japan during the year of the Olympics as follows:

Here was Japan seen in a new light. The world was impressed with the superb organization and spectacle. Visitors were impressed with the charm of the Japanese people, and became instant opponents of maintaining a silly war-generated stereotypical view of the Japanese—even in Australia, where the Japanese were, by and large till then, considered to be subhuman. Japanese who were youths at that time speak of the tremendous impact of the many young foreign athletes who poured in. (10)

Fields’ description of “Japan seen in a new light” is particularly salient as its metaphorical meaning is matched by an actual focus on achieving literal brightness within the city that hosted the Olympics. Tokyo Police, in preparation for welcoming the world to their city, announced their intention to create a “bright and crime-free town” and subsequently issued minimum brightness requirements for the lights of all-night coffee houses (popular youth hang-outs) and even purchased illuminometers to measure brightness (Igarashi 152–53).

Authorities used the games as an opportunity to clean, brighten, and revitalize Japan’s image in the international community. Likewise, they cleaned, brightened, and

subjected Tokyo to frenzied infrastructural development (Igarashi 146). The government invested 29.5 billion yen (\$81.9 million)⁸ in direct expenses and 960 billion yen (\$2.7 billion) in indirect expenses. The sum total investment came to 1 trillion yen (\$2.8 billion). For context, the entire national budget in 1958, eight years before the Olympics took place, was only 1.3 trillion yen (\$3.6 billion) (Igarashi 146). This frenzy of construction, cleaning, and brightening transformed Tokyo's skyline, sewage system, and the lives of its inhabitants who were mobilized in the service of this transformation (Igarashi 148–53). As many as 1.6 million Tokyoites, for instance, helped to clean the city streets on 10 January 1964 alone (Igarashi 148).

Thus, Tokyo soon came to appear as a “bright space where nothing could hide in the interstices” and all of Japan correspondingly came to be seen in a “new light” (Igarashi 153). These frenzied attempts at constructing a new image for Japan necessitated that the ghosts of criminality, poverty, and suffering that marked the war and occupation eras be forever exorcised and banished. On the surface, the attempt appeared highly successful. Japan was welcomed back into the international community as a “good”, “exemplary”, and “harmless” nation.

It is precisely, however, these lingering ghosts of criminality, poverty, and suffering that the play *The Little Match Girl* draws out from between the cracks and interstices in the sanitary and the modern. The older couple in the play may claim they have forgotten and recovered, but their attempts to move beyond the past prove ultimately futile. In a parallel way, the actors in the play form “an accusatory team, challenging their audience to remember their own experience [in the wartime] and value

⁸ All conversions from yen to US dollars are done by the relevant year's exchange rate.

it” (Kraly 18). The play argues that an event as traumatic as war and its aftermath cannot be erased in a mere two decades. For survivors of this degradation, the “search for rationalization and understanding continues until today” (Kraly 19). The Japanese government may have convinced the outside world that the nation is full of “good”, “exemplary” and “harmless” citizens, but the older couple find they cannot so easily banish their past when it appears on their doorstep and claims to be their daughter. This is, however, exactly what happens in the play. And through the ensuing action, the audience is forced, in a similar way, to gently question themselves: are we *truly* good citizens?

Identity Presentation: Conclusion

The older couple in *The Little Match Girl* mirror, in their behavior, three important trends in the re-construction of Japanese identity in the 60s: the desires to appear unique, in-between, and a good citizen. The play facilitates critical reflection and authentic emotional reaction to these behaviors by divorcing them from a discussion of the nation as a whole and instead embodying them in the actions of idiosyncratic and comedic characters. The distance between history and drama is lengthened by the usage of the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale. It is therefore up to the audience to make the connection between the behavior of the characters and the nation. The clues, however, are clear.

Rejection: Introduction

In *The Little Match Girl*, the historical theme of self-representation is placed in direct conversation with another major historical theme: rejection. The older couple in the

play attempt to present themselves as unique, in-between, and good citizens, and in doing so, they reject two important claims the younger woman makes: that she is their daughter, and that they prostituted her when she was a child. Considering that “theatre mirrors the spirit of the time”, this raises a provocative question: was Japan in the 60s, in its desire to appear unique, in-between, and a good citizen, also rejecting its own children and its own past as a pimp?

Rejection: Denial of Parentage

The play begins with the older couple welcoming the younger woman in, gladly demonstrating their self-proclaimed uniqueness and excellent hospitality, and scrambling to cater to any possible desire she might have. Their outward show of warmth is quickly curtailed, however, by the announcement she makes: according to the family records at city hall, she is their long-lost daughter (whom they had previously assumed dead). Faced with this revelation, the atmosphere turns cold, and the man and woman who have just been implicated as parents begin to display a diverse and dramatic array of reactions that range from acceptance, to avoidance, to polite denial, to outright rejection.

“It can’t be. It’s not possible. I don’t have a daughter. We did have a daughter...but she died. She is dead” (39; 18) — these are the words that the woman’s announcement is greeted with. The alleged father continues to utter these objections throughout most of the play; however, the alleged mother begins to warm to the idea. If their daughter were somehow alive, she points out, she would be about this woman’s age, and this woman does look a bit like their daughter did. The husband, however, remains immovable (39; 19). The older couple face a second shock when the woman announces she has a younger brother — the couple’s alleged son. Even the wife objects this time,

saying “we really didn’t have a son” (41; 21), but when neither the sister nor brother show any doubt that they are both the couple’s children, the tension escalates and explodes with the older man’s speech:

We did not have a son! I want to make that very clear. *Did not have!* That’s the truth! We had a daughter. We had a cat. But no son. *There...never... was...one.* Do you understand? All right. Now, saying that doesn’t mean that I want to put the two of you out. So please, just relax. Eat as much as you like. Drink as much as you like. I just want to make this one point. It may seem a mean thing to say, but I think it’s important to be sure that it’s clear. About this...this house. It is our home. You...are our guests. (43; 23)⁹

In this way, the couple, especially the father, vehemently reject their two alleged children. Interestingly, the father also feels the need to affirm that he and his wife are the exclusive owners of their property and that their sharing it with the other characters is an act of generosity, not duty. This clarification comes as a reaction to a claim the younger woman made in passing when speaking to her brother a few lines earlier: “This is our home” (43; 23).

What social, historical, or cultural situation could the play be mirroring with this evocative image of estranged children being rejected by their parents? While there are many possible answers, I focus on the most literal parallel of dramatic child-rejection that can be found within the period: the situation of Japanese repatriation and “war orphans” following the end of the Pacific War.

The pre-1945 Imperial Japanese government aggressively promoted resettlement and colonization throughout much of “Greater East Asia” (Japanese holdings in Manchuria, China, Korea, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia). In 1932, the government called for the emigration of “One Million Japanese Farm Households [meaning six million

⁹ Emphasis in original.

Japanese individuals] to Manchuria” and, subsequently, a large population of agrarian Japanese settlers responded to the call (Tamanoi 527). As the Pacific War escalated, many of the adult male colonists were drafted into the dwindling reserves of the Japanese military (Tamanoi 528). Thus, many of the settlers left at the war’s end were women and children.

On 9 August 1945, the day the Soviets attacked Manchuria, more than 1.5 million Japanese nationals were left in the region. The next day, the Japanese army was ordered to fall back and defend Korea. Consequently, an estimated 223,000 civilian settlers were “effectively abandoned” overnight (Efird 367). More than a third never made it back to Japan alive. An estimated 11,500 died by violence, almost half of those by suicide (Efird 367). Another 67,000 (mostly women, children, and the elderly) perished by starvation and disease (Efird 368). Large numbers of those that did manage to return had to brave a severe winter, retaliation by militant Chinese peasants, and the confusion of the Chinese civil war between Communists and Nationalists. Many spent months in flight and captivity (Efird 368).

In these conditions, many those with young children were forced to, in their own words, “‘abandon’, ‘give up’, ‘entrust’, ‘sell’, or ‘leave’ their children to Chinese families to save their own lives as well as the lives of their children” (Tamanoi 528). These adopted children of Japanese parentage grew up in Manchuria facing serious racism, discrimination, and abuse at the hands of Chinese villagers who blamed them for Japan’s colonial past. These children were ridiculed as being children of imperialists, but were ironically otherwise indistinguishable from their Chinese foster parents, whose language

and culture they quickly adopted. Many all-but-forgot their “mother tongue” of Japanese, and some had been too young to ever speak it in the first place (Tamanoi 532).

While many Japanese were quickly repatriated to Japan, these dispersed, abandoned, culturally-Chinese children posed a problem. Would the Japanese government wait indefinitely for their return, or provide additional assistance in their repatriation? Or would they put the onus on the children, assuming that if they did not return soon, it was because they did not want to, rather than because they could not? In 1958, the government issued the first inscription on “the unreturned”, declaring that any Japanese left outside Japan were now dead (Efird 373–74). The problem with this was that many of the Japanese children abandoned in Manchuria were not actually dead (Efird 374). Were these children-of-Japanese-parents to try to reclaim their Japanese citizenship following this inscription, however, they would have found the legal pathways blocked. The whole situation resembles that in *The Little Match Girl* where the younger woman arrives on her parent’s doorstep only to be told, “My daughter is dead” (39; 18).

The resemblance between the estranged children in *The Little Match Girl* and the “war orphans” (*sensai koji*), as the abandoned children were christened, does not end there. In an analysis of Japanese repatriation, Warner describes how “the greatest single aid in the social rehabilitation of the repatriate has been [...] the cohesive force exerted by the Japanese family” (274). In the case of the “war orphan”, however, the declaration of death caused family records of missing children to be “eliminated” (Efird 374).

Eventually, in the 70s, “war orphans” and activists managed to persuade the government to revive the possibility of new repatriations. In later decades, “war orphans” were allowed to repatriate to Japan provided they had a Japanese guarantor. Contrary,

however, to “the widespread stock images of emotional reunions between war orphans and their families, many Japanese relatives of identified war orphans proved reluctant to serve as guarantors for the return of their long-lost children and siblings” (Efird 377). A significant number of the children were, by then, culturally and linguistically indistinguishable from the Chinese villagers they had grown up with. Thus, they faced rejection by both their Japanese families and Japanese society as a whole (Efird 377; Tamanoi 533).

This connection between *The Little Match Girl* and repatriated “war orphans” must be examined critically, as the official repatriation of “war orphans” (after being declared dead in 1958) did not begin again until 1981, yet the play premiered in 1966. This does not, however, mean that Japanese society was unaware of the issue before then. In 1950, the “War Orphan Assistance Association” (*Sensai Koji Engo Kyōkai*), published four books, seeking to raise awareness of the plight of war orphans (“Sensai Koji Engo Kyōkai”).

The existence of these historical records indicates that concern and awareness for war orphans were present in Japan since the end of the war (which is logical, considering the fact that many of the orphans’ parents successfully repatriated and would have remembered the fact that they left their children behind). There is another reason, however, beyond general societal awareness, that Betsuyaku Minoru might be particularly sensitive to issues of “war orphans”: he too was born in Manchuria, in 1937. Unlike in the case of war orphans, however, Betsuyaku’s family successfully navigated famine, warfare, and confusion and safely repatriated themselves and their child to Japan, where Betsuyaku would live for the rest of his life (Rolf 15).

Betsuyaku was not abandoned as a “war orphan”, but his experience as a repatriated Japanese citizen left its mark on him. He “linguistically felt something of an outsider in Japan, in that, although he is a native Japanese speaker, he is excluded from the all-important unspoken aspects of interpersonal communication in Japan” (Powell 181). This has had an influence on his playwriting. His scripts often follow “the logic of only what is spoken, rather than the whole situation” (Powell 181). This trait ended up working to his advantage, however, as his plays are easier to understand in translation than some of his contemporaries (Powell 181).

It may be impossible (without asking Betsuyaku himself) to prove whether or not the playwright had “war orphans” in mind when he wrote *The Little Match Girl*. It seems likely, however, considering that knowledge of “war orphans” was available at the time the play was written, and that Betsuyaku himself was also born in Manchuria. Furthermore, whether or not the parallels between play and historical reality were consciously constructed does not, in fact, necessarily matter. Regardless of the playwright’s intention, his play itself reflects the “spirit” and reality of this social issue. *The Little Match Girl* presents audiences with a story of two adults who are so obsessed with stabilizing and defending their own image that they refuse to accept their long-lost child. This reflects the ways in which the Japanese government in the 50s and 60s poured trillions of yen into improving its international image, yet declared thousands of its own children dead.

Rejection: Denial of Prostituting One's Daughter

The second instance of rejection in *The Little Match Girl* is once again implicating the older couple, specifically the father. In summary: his alleged daughter accuses him of teaching her to lift her own skirt for money and he denies everything. This issue of prostitution is first alluded to even before the younger woman reveals her identity as the man's daughter. She only ever refers to her past euphemistically, saying, "I was selling matches... [...] and while they were burning..." (37; 16). The full story, however, is made clear by a low, murmuring dramatic voice-over that takes place directly beforehand:

That child was selling matches at the street corner. When a match was struck, she would lift her shabby skirt for display until the match went out. People made anxious by the small crimes they had committed, people who could not even commit such crimes, night after night, in their trembling fingers, would strike those matches. Directed at the infinite darkness hidden by that skirt, how many times that small light had burned, until it had burned out...

Those two thin legs held a darkness as profound as that of the depths of the sea, darker than all the darkness of that city floating on a swampland gathered together. As she stood there above that darkness, the little girl smiled aimlessly, or seemed empty and sad. (36; 15)

The young woman soon reveals that she was this little match girl who lifted her skirt while the matches were burning. This is a notable diversion from the original Hans Christian Anderson story where "the matches represented hope to the girl, they were a means to save her life, and the blaze of the matches she lights to try [to] stay warm becomes the light of heaven reaching out to her" (Kraly 21). In Betsuyaku's re-interpretation of the fairy tale, however, "the darkness becomes overwhelming, such that the light of the matches is tainted" and outweighed by the gloom and degradation that surrounds it (Kraly 21).

After revealing her past act, the daughter explains that there is something that has been bothering her since the time of the story, twenty years ago. “Why did I do a thing like that?” she asks, “How could I ever have thought of doing such a thing? I was only seven years old. Could a child of seven think of that kind of thing? [...] I’m sure that someone must have taught me to” (37–38; 16–17). She proceeds to ask the man she will soon declare to be her father directly: “Was it you? [...] Were you the one who taught me to [lift my skirt for money]?” (38; 17).

The father, through the course of the play, denies this complicity in his alleged daughter’s past prostitution. His guilt, however, is seconded by his alleged son who murmurs, near the end of the play, “Father bought matches. Father bought matches. Father bought matches. Every night...every night...for my sister...night after night for my sister...” to which the man insistently responds “I didn’t do that. I never did that kind of thing” (50; 32).

The woman’s initial question about how she learned to lift her skirt while the matches were burning bears notable similarity to an iconic line in a sentimental pop song about a prostitute released in December 1947. The song, “In the Flow of the Stars” (*Hoshi no nagare ni*), is most famous for its refrain: *konna onna ni dare ga shita*, or “Who made me such a woman?” (Dower 123). This line resembles what an amalgamation of two of the younger woman’s lines might look like. This is the combination of “*Watashi, naze, anna koto o shitan deshō?*” (16) and “*Watashi ni oshiete kudasatta no wa?*” (17), in English: “Why did I do a thing like that?” and “Were you the one who taught me?” (38). The most notable linguistic difference between the song’s refrain and the younger woman’s lines is, perhaps, that while the song refrain is in

informal Japanese, the daughter, when speaking to her alleged father and asking him if he is guilty of teaching her to conduct these shameful actions, uses the honorific verb *kudasaru*. This is a standard social convention when speaking to an acquaintance who is older than the speaker. It also, however, carries the added implication that the one who taught her to do this action is someone of higher social status than she is. This seems appropriate as the ones at fault for postwar prostitution were “usually understood not to be the sleazy procurers and pimps who took advantage of such destitute young women, but an incompetent government bureaucracy” (Dower 123).

The song “In the Flow of the Stars” was actually inspired by a real letter written by a twenty-one year old prostitute and published on 29 September 1946 in the popular newspaper *Mainichi Shimbun*. The young woman describes how, after being repatriated from Manchuria (just like Betsuyaku Minoru), she found herself in Tokyo without connections or resources and soon ended up living in the “cavernous reaches” of Ueno Station. She spent three days starving there before being given rice balls by a stranger who soon after recruited her to become a “woman of the dark” (Dower 123). There is a clear connection between the story of this woman (as told in both her original letter and the melodramatic pop song she inspired) and the story of the character in *The Little Match Girl*.

The question remains: what historical reality is the play reflecting in its provocative depiction of a girl who was prostituted by her own father? According to Toshifumi Sueki, who directed the greatest number of Betsuyaku’s plays, the play is often interpreted in a way that “implicates the emperor system” (Rolf 19). When considering this, a number of answers quickly appear. If the patriarchal authority of the

emperor is equated with the patriarchal authority of the father, the play takes on a whole new historical dimension.

The comparison of a patriarchal emperor to a patriarchal father might not strike a Western observer as obvious. Japanese people, however, both those who grew up before the Second World War and after it, would have been familiar with the traditional belief that the emperor is the “Father of Japan” and the “patriarch of the Japanese race” (Akira 322). The wartime ideology of Japanese ultra-nationalism most clearly established a precedent of viewing the emperor as a patriarch of both the national and ethnic community. The occupation authority’s decision to keep the Shōwa emperor, Hirohito, on the throne perpetuated some aspects of this patriarchal order.

If the emperor, then, was a “father”, was there ever a point where he could be said to have prostituted his own “daughters”? I argue that such a situation can be found in the still highly-contested issue of comfort women. The story of the events that directly lead up to the first and most infamous institutionalization of comfort women begins with the 1937 Nanjing Massacre. At the scene of this historic atrocity, Japanese soldiers indiscriminately raped and murdered large numbers of Chinese women (Lie 254). The corresponding negative international news coverage of the event “cast a long shadow on Japanese leaders’ thinking about war and male violence” (Lie 254). The Japanese military was thus faced with the problem of preventing their soldiers from satisfying their sexual appetites in ways that cause further publicity scandals (and further spread of venereal disease, already a problem within the Japanese armed forces). Initial solutions involved sending Japanese prostitutes overseas to service the overseas Japanese soldiers. This solution quickly fell from favor, however, as many Japanese prostitutes suffered

from VD, the prevention of which was one of the goals of the program. The recruitment of “ordinary” Japanese women would have undermined the patriarchal ideology of the war, which was ostensibly fought to protect Japanese women and “for the sake of family and country” (Lie 254). Therefore, up to 200,000 Korean women (who were, under the prevalent racist ideology, considered similar, but also inferior, to Japanese women) were recruited or coerced into become *ianfu*, or “comfort women”, sexual servants of the Japanese military (Lie 255).

There is an obvious problem in the logic here: how could the Emperor be prostituting his “own” daughters if the comfort women were Korean, not Japanese? The key issue is that Korea was a Japanese colony, and subjects of colonial empires are still imperial subjects. Koreans were, therefore, subjects of the emperor, just like native-born Japanese citizens were. They were also, however, second-class citizens, victims of a double-standard by which they became Japanese imperial subjects in terms of responsibilities, but not privileges. Subjugation to the Japanese emperor was, moreover, not a mere symbolic exercise but a policy of “active assimilation” that forcibly altered Koreans’ identity (Soh 69):

The agenda included reciting the ‘Pledge of the Imperial Subjects’, hoisting the Japanese national flag, worshipping the emperor, and attending Shinto ceremonies. Further assimilation policies followed, requiring the changing of Korean names into Japanese ones and creating a new national identity for the colonized Koreans. (Soh 69)

In addition to extending the banner of imperialism and of Japanese nationalism abroad, this forced assimilation served the purpose of justifying the mobilization of Koreans in service of “their” emperor. Male Koreans were often conscripted as laborers or soldiers, and female Koreans, as laborers or comfort women. The connection between

the emperor and the comfort women is even more clearly established, however, by the rhetorical framing of Korean comfort women as an imperial “‘gift’, rewarding the emperor’s warriors in a spirit of paternalistic *omoiyari* (consideration)” (Soh 70). Comfort women, authorities of the time argued, were merely performing their “gendered duties as imperial subjects” (Soh 70). Due to the ethnocentric imperialist double-standard, Korean women were not “Japanese” enough to have their chastity protected, but were “Japanese” enough to have a duty to be obedient “daughters” of the emperor. In this way, for the first and most dramatic time, did the emperor tell his own “daughters”, just like the woman in *The Little Match Girl*, to lift their own skirts.

It would not to be the last time. Upon the end of the war and the news of an oncoming Allied occupation of Japan, many Japanese “feared American soldiers would do unto them what their soldiers had done to Koreans, Chinese, and other conquered peoples during the war” (Lie 256). In part, they were right, in that the “new comfort women” would soon be Japanese women serving American soldiers. What they were wrong about was that it would not be the American, but the Japanese government who would establish this system. Wartime authorities reasoned that recruiting a few thousand Korean women to serve as state-sponsored prostitutes for the occupying Japanese forces would prevent the mass rape of the remaining Asian women. By the same logic, they also reasoned that the recruitment of a few thousand Japanese women to serve as state-sponsored prostitutes for the occupying Allied forces would prevent the mass rape of the remaining Japanese women (Dower 124). Thus, in the words of the newly-established R.A.A.—Recreation and Amusement Association (*Tokushu Ian Shisetsu Kyōkai*)—in “the great spirit of maintaining the national polity by protecting the pure blood of the

hundred million” and in order to promote “mutual understanding between [the Allied occupation forces] and our people, and to contribute to the smooth development of people’s diplomacy and abet the construction of a peaceful world”, young Japanese women were recruited to “build a breakwater to hold back the raging waves” and act as “an invisible underground pillar at the root of the postwar social order” (Dower 127–28). In other words, they became state-sponsored prostitutes.

On 28 August 1945, the day the Allied forces began to arrive in Japan, a group of women who were about to take on the role of the “breakwater” gathered in front of the imperial palace in Tokyo for the R.A.A. inaugural ceremony. The oath they swore (likely written by a man) concludes with the words: “We dare to say it loudly: we are but offering ourselves for the defense of the national polity. We reaffirm this. This is our proclamation” (Dower 128). “National polity”, in English a rather obscure-sounding term, is how the difficult-to-translate Japanese word *kokutai* (literally “national body”) is often rendered. Professor Motohiku Anzu, a Shinto scholar has said, in regards to *kokutai*: “If you regard a State as a form or container[,] the contents that fill this form or container is the reality of a state, that is, the *kokutai*.” Because the “reality of the Japanese nation is characterized by an imperial reign,” it follows that “*kokutai* means an emperor state” (Kitagawa 209). This professor’s viewpoint, while not universal, was not in any way uncommon during the nationalistically-charged atmosphere of the prewar and war periods. Thus, when a group of women gather in front of the imperial palace and say they are “offering [themselves] for the defense of the national polity [*kokutai*]” it is not merely an act of nationalism, but also of emperor-centric ideology.

Korean comfort women were imperial “gifts” to loyal Japanese soldiers. Japanese comfort women, in addition to being a “breakwater”, were also imperial gifts for Japanese entrepreneurs. Some procurers who received commissions to establish R.A.A. brothels regarded this sudden business venture as an auspicious windfall. A few “publicly expressed their gratitude for this lucrative opportunity to serve the nation by gathering in front of the imperial palace and shouting, ‘Long live the emperor!’” (Dower 126).

Thus, when the woman in *The Little Match Girl* asks her alleged father if he was the one who taught her to prostitute herself, she may as well be asking on behalf of the thousands of imperial subjects (both Japanese and Korean) who were told to prostitute themselves by their own patriarch. Whether or not the actual individual, Emperor Hirohito, was involved in either decision is incidental to the fact that the invocation of his status as emperor was instrumental to the rhetoric surrounding both. Both Japanese and Korean comfort women were told that they were fulfilling the wish of the emperor. Furthermore, when the father in the play refuses to admit that he committed any such deed, he may as well be speaking on behalf of the emperor who remained unharmed on the throne of a nation whose government, for decades disputed and denied that there had been any coercion of Korean comfort women (Lynch).

Rejection: Conclusion

The Little Match Girl paints a dark, complex, interconnected picture of Japan in the 60s. Three themes surface: patriarchal authority, prostitution, and the conflict of older and younger generations. Some of both the actors in the play and those on the historical stage tried to move beyond their past sins by rejecting any responsibility for them. The

play reveals, however, that this solution favors patriarchs and the older generation, hurting prostitutes and the younger generation. The older couple reject their children in the same way the Japanese government rejected “war orphans” and they deny prostituting their daughter in the same way the government denied prostituting imperial subjects as comfort women. Within the play, the themes of both identity presentation and rejection repeatedly implicate issues of patriarchy, prostitution, inter-generational conflict. Therefore, through illuminating the complex ways in which these issues relate to 60s Japan, *The Little Match Girl* “mirrors the spirit of the times” in profound and unexpected ways.

CHAPTER 2: *THE KING OF LA MANCHA'S CLOTHES* AND THE NAKED TRUTH OF THE HIGH-GROWTH ERA

The King of La Mancha's Clothes is a play about an idealistic schoolteacher who idolizes the fictional character Don Quixote.¹⁰ Just like the fictional knight, the teacher found that his quest—in his case, to inspire his delinquent students to proper behavior—was a losing battle. His hope revived one day, however, when a female student wrote him a secret letter of encouragement in which she called him Don Quixote. He responded, calling her Dulcinea, and the two of them began a regular exchange of secret notes that became more and more intimate. This continued until one day, when he found all his letters posted on the wall in the classroom with a group of his students, including so-called-Dulcinea, reading them and laughing. The girl who he thought supported him had in fact been manipulating him from the start. Just like the emperor with no clothes, he had been misled and exposed. Enraged, he pulled out a pocket knife and cut the face of the student who had betrayed him. The play begins ten years after this incident. The ex-schoolteacher is now in a coma, and he is still unable to deal with his guilt and shame over these events.

The action of the play takes place mostly inside the coma, where the ex-schoolteacher dreams of himself as two people: a Fool and a king (aka Emperor).¹¹ The two wander around a windswept moor in a self-conscious homage to a similar scene in

¹⁰ To clarify, I will be italicizing the names of works of fiction but not of characters. Therefore, for example, Don Quixote the character comes from *Don Quixote* the novel.

¹¹ Each of the characters in this play is named after an occupation, therefore when I refer to them by their occupation (i.e. “innkeeper’s wife” or “travelling player”) I will not capitalize their names, but when I refer to them by their name, (i.e. “Wife” or “Player”) I will capitalize them.

King Lear (186; 9–10) and eventually come to a medieval European inn. They meet various characters: an Innkeeper, his Wife, a travelling player, the player's two children, and a Servant who turns out to be Sancho Panza in search of his long-lost master. Over the course of the play, the Emperor's past is revealed: one day, he was misled into appearing naked before his subjects, a child pointed this out and laughed at him, and ever since, the Emperor fled the throne and began disguising himself, and ever since then, the country entered a state of decay. A dark age of selfishness, lawlessness, and materialism now prevails. Ordinary people like the Innkeeper and the Player struggle to make ends meet while those who adapt to the ruthless nature of the times find greater financial success. Throughout the play, the Emperor's distress over the progressively-darkening state of his kingdom grows, and he is eventually unable to continue and reveals his true identity. He then discovers that this is, in fact, a dream, and that he is really a disgraced ex-schoolteacher. From this point, he searches for absolution.

Through this play, Yokouchi Kensuke reframes and reformulates the discussion of various social trends from the Japanese era of rapid economic growth, at the very end of which he wrote this play. Most of these trends relate to patriarchal authority, prostitution, or inter-generational conflict. Most notably, the play paints a metaphorical picture of the crisis within the Japanese education system, where all three of these issues intersect. More precisely, these are not necessarily issues *within* education, but issues *around* education; social, political, economic, cultural, religious, and moral developments that influence the educational environment. The play mirrors how Japanese society during this period became alarmed by the behavior of its children, only to realize that the children were simply enacting the norms put in place by adults.

I organize my discussion around two complementary motifs: clothing and nakedness. Clothing in this play often functions to create a certain image of the “self”, much like the older couple’s actions and words in *The Little Match Girl*. Self-representation through clothing occurs both within the play and within Japanese education, both at the international and local levels. It entails, at its worst, the “covering up” of uglier truths such as bullying. Nakedness, on the other hand, connects with the two divergent concepts of materialism and absolution. Materialism in the play and the historical period produces a number conditions that, in both cases, result in the commodification of young girls’ naked bodies. Absolution, however, reverses the trend of commodification and exploitation by exposing the lies of the patriarchs and adults who are actually responsible for exploiting women and children. I will discuss these motifs in order to understand how the play “mirrors the spirit” of a time when education was a subject of national pride, concern, and introspection.

Clothing Japanese Education: The Play

The Emperor in *The King of La Mancha’s Clothes* has a very particular relationship with clothing. He first appears onstage wearing “layer after laying of clothing wrapped around him.” In Japanese, the stage directions use the onomatopoeia *guru-guru*, meaning “around and around” to further emphasize the sense of envelopment in fabric (185; 5).¹² The Emperor is thus already overdressed, however, before leaving his

¹² I will be citing the following editions of this play, once again using the format: (English page number; Japanese page number). English edition used: Yokouchi, Kensuke. “The King of La Mancha’s Clothes.” *Half a Century of Japanese Theater: 1980s Part 1*. Edited by the Japan Playwrights Association, Translated by J. Thomas Rimer, Kinokuniya, 2001. Print. Japanese edition used: Yokouchi, Kensuke. *Gusha ni wa mienai La Mancha no ōsama no hadaka*. Teatoro, 1994. Print.

room to go wander on the windswept moor, he proceeds to put “a mantle like gown over all his other clothes” (185; 7).

As the action continues, it appears that the Emperor is most concerned not so much with what clothing he wears, but with whether or not he is wearing clothes. He seems insecure, and needs validation that he is, in fact, not naked. Shortly before leaving his room, while wrapped in many layers, he asks his Fool:

EMPEROR: Now, tell me fool, I’m not naked am I?
 FOOL: No....
 EMPEROR: It’s all right then? Well then, let’s go.
(The EMPEROR begins to leave then suddenly stops)
 EMPEROR: You’ll swear to God then that I’m not naked?
 FOOL: No....
 EMPEROR: It’s all right then? Well then, let’s go. (185; 7)¹³

His fool’s assurance is, however, not enough for the Emperor. He proceeds to ask the same question to the next two characters he meets. When he encounters the Servant, wandering on the windswept moor, they have the following exchange:

EMPEROR: Look carefully [...] Am I naked?
 SERVANT: Huh?
 EMPEROR: Look carefully and answer me. Am I naked now?
 SERVANT: Huh?
 EMPEROR: Look now, and answer me! Am I naked?!
 SERVANT: [...] You are certainly wearing your clothes. You are not naked. [...]
 EMPEROR: Do you hear that Fool, somehow or other, I don’t seem to be naked. (189; 17–18)

The Emperor’s great concern over the remotest possibility of nakedness is even more clear in the Japanese script. In this version, the Emperor, before receiving full assurance that he is not naked, twice punctuates the Servant’s words by saying: “!”. These “lines” were, however, removed in the English translation, probably because the technique of

¹³ Translation slightly altered by me so that each *de wa*, which is used twice in the Japanese, is translated consistently into the same phrase—“well then”—in English)

listing characters as “saying” only punctuation marks (such as “!” or “...”) is uncommon in English-language scripts (189; 17–18).

The Emperor asks his question for a third time when he meets the Innkeeper:

EMPEROR: So then, Mister Innkeeper, am I naked?

INNKEEPER: Huh?

EMPEROR: (*A bit uneasily*) Am I naked?

INNKEEPER: No, in fact you have lots of clothes on....

EMPEROR: What you mean to say is that I’m not naked then.... (191–92; 23)

The Emperor’s obsession with not-being-naked is such that it even prevents him from changing his clothes. The very first line in the script is a statement by a Nurse (in the world of the hospital rather than the dream) telling the Emperor (who is, in fact, an invalid): “You’d better change your clothes. Really, they stink, you know” (184; 4). This indicates he has not been changing them, probably because he is so afraid of being naked.

Once again, soon after entering the moor, the Emperor’s fool suggests to him:

“Shouldn’t we exchange our clothes?” to which the Emperor initially agrees, saying “Yes, that is a good idea.” After removing about one layer, however, he catches himself, and bursts out: “Ah! That will never do. Never! Never!” (186–87; 11). Once again, he refuses to remove his clothing, even with no one around but his Fool.

These various exchanges in which a clearly overdressed man obsessively seeks confirmation that he is not naked have both comedic and thematic value. They indicate that, after having been tricked once, the Emperor is now careful not to let down his guard. He is deeply fearful of letting the world see him too intimately. Moreover, he is even scared of letting the world know his real identity. He introduces himself and his Fool to the people in the inn as “simply travelers on a brief voyage” (197; 36). The Fool advises him to do as much, since, “in an instant, if you [the Emperor] were recognized for who

you are, you would pay dearly for it” (194; 30). The Emperor’s shame and disappearance ten years ago caused the country to fall into ruin: everyone now only believes in what they can see, and consequently art, religion, morality, and kindness have all steadily become devalued and impotent in the face of materialism and lawlessness. Many blame the Emperor for indirectly open the door to this foreboding social change, and thus, he must conceal himself to escape their wrath (198; 39–40).

What real-world societal issue could this desperate desire to conceal one’s identity and keep up one’s guard be mirroring? An answer lies in the theme of education. The Emperor, is, after all, a manifestation of the mind of a dreaming ex-public-school-teacher. So why would a ex-schoolteacher dream himself as a character obsessed with his own image? Was the education system also obsessed with its own image?

Clothing Japanese Education: Image on the Global Stage

“Like Japan’s manufacturing system and its industrial policy, her education has also become a ‘challenge,’ even a ‘model,’ for America” explained Thomas Rohlen, professor and author of the book *Japan’s High Schools* (29). The image he and others painted of the Japanese education system made quite an impact abroad during the high-growth era. Japanese education became associated, in international discourse, with students who “outperform all others” on “a whole raft” of science and math tests (Rohlen 30). Western authors extolled how Japan lead the world in various metrics, such as newspaper readership level, percentage of students who finished twelfth grade, and percentage of male students who achieved B.A.s (Rohlen 30). Japanese children went to school for fifty more days each year, so, “by high-school graduation, they [had] been in

school somewhere between three and four more years than their American counterparts” (Rohlen 30).

No one now denies that this is a most impressive portrait of national achievement. Japan has succeeded in holding very high standards for virtually its entire population, standards typical of elites in Western countries. It would not be an exaggeration to say that in many respects the upper half of Japan's graduating high-school students possess a level of knowledge and the analytic skills equivalent to the average American graduating from college. (Rohlen 30)

Rohlen presents one of the major arguments in the American debate over Japanese education in the 80s: “that the education model for the twenty-first century [lay] across the Pacific” (Schoolland 9).

Nationalist American discourse during the high growth era referred to Japan’s “export prowess” as a “major challenge” for the United States: one that is “social and cultural as well as economic” (Rohlen 29). In order to support this hypothesis, the education system was effectively conceptualized as part of the “social” and “cultural” dimension of the Japanese “challenge”. In other words, education was reduced to a training ground for future economic leaders. The theory held that Japan’s economic ascendancy must be the result of a corresponding level of educational ascendancy and Japan’s educational system, therefore, presented a “challenge” for the United States. The blurring of economic success, educational success, and national success, moreover, emphasized that the international image of Japanese education had significant implications for the international image of the nation as a whole during this time.

So extensive was the American fixation on Japanese education as a “challenge” that one US publisher “insisted” that a researcher name her book *The Japanese Educational Challenge*, even though this was not the main emphasis of the actual book

(Schoolland 13). This title was chosen, however, because it “might attract people who wanted to confirm their stereotypes about Japan, especially those who believe that the Japanese were in a campaign to win in the schools as well as in trade” (Schoolland 13). This educational “challenge”, at its core, was focused on empowering “‘our’ team [the United States] to beat ‘their’ team [Japan] on the economic playing field” (Schoolland 10). To this purpose, discourse centered on the question: “should our team behave the same as their team in order to beat them?” (Schoolland 10). In other words, should the United States adopt the Japanese educational system in order to outcompete Japanese business? The answer to this question would depend on what kind of image Japanese education had in the United States. Thus, image took on great importance.

The impact that the image of Japanese education made across the Pacific is demonstrated clearly in the US National Commission on Excellence in Education’s 1983 call-to-arms, *A Nation at Risk*:

History is not kind to idlers [...] We live among determined, well-educated, and strongly motivated competitors. We compete with them for international standing and markets, not only with products but also with the ideas of our laboratories and neighbourhood workshops. America’s position in the world may once have been reasonably secure with only a few exceptionally well-trained men and women. It is no longer.

The risk is not only that the Japanese make automobiles more efficiently than Americans and have government subsidies for development and export [...] It is also that these developments signify a redistribution of trained capability throughout the globe. (Cummings 293)

As a consequence of this sentiment reaching higher and higher into the US government, president Ronald Reagan, in his visit to Japan, had extensive discussions with Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro on the topic of education. Consequently, groups in both the United States and Japan made efforts to promote better relations between both countries educators. Some allocated funds to support Americans on “educational pilgrimage[s]” to

visit Japan (Cummings 294). The glowing reports these “pilgrims” brought back to the United States would serve an important role in the further constructing an international image of Japanese education.

Some scholars, however, critiqued the validity of any findings based on this sort of short-term classroom observation by a foreigner. They argued that the image of Japanese education built through short-term observations and heavy focus on metrics such as test scores was shallow and incomplete. Some stated that the presence of an American observer significantly altered the nature of the Japanese classroom. Foreign observers, writers, and journalists were not looking at the naked truth of Japanese education, but a “façade” (Schoolland 106).

One reason for this is that the Japanese are intensely concerned about what foreigners think about Japan. Therefore, the hospitality that foreigners are afforded is always superb. There is a certain chameleon-like transformation that occurs when outsiders arrive for visits.
(Schoolland 106)

The Emperor is obsessed with clothing himself in garments that protect him from criticism. Japanese classrooms put on a performance that does the same. In doing so, they contribute to the construction of international image of Japanese education that reflects well on the nation as a whole.

Clothing Japanese Education: Image on the Local Stage

Keith Richburg, author of the 1985 *Washington Post* article “U.S. Educators Marvel at Japan’s Schools”, describes the observations of a team of American education experts who undertook a week-long visit to Kyoto and Tokyo schools:

In most schools, children wear uniforms: black pants, white shirts and black high-collar military-looking jackets for the boys; blue skirts and sweaters, white socks and blouses for the girls. Cosmetics are usually not

allowed, and teachers in many schools keep a bottle of nail polish remover at their desk, in case some girls attempt a brazen show of individuality. (Schoolland 14)

It is intriguing that part of the admiration these American educators felt for Japanese schools was not simply admiration for the students' disciplined behavior, but also for the students' disciplined appearance. In other words, the positive international image of Japanese education was not simply because Japanese schoolchildren acted like well-educated youth, but also because they *looked* like well-educated youth.

The importance of appearance in Japanese public schools in the 80s goes far beyond what Americans on a weeklong "education pilgrimage" likely realized. A sampling of various common school rules from the period reveals the importance schools attributed to strict adherence to a certain physical appearance for their students. Rules often banned clothing such as: color ribbons, socks, "other private clothing", sunglasses, or jewelry (except watches). They restricted the way that clothes could be worn: no sweaters or jackets inside classrooms, no altering the school uniforms in any way, no outdoor shoes inside buildings, and no stepping on the back of one's shoes (a practice that deforms shoes in order that they may be slipped on and off more conveniently). They restricted other personal aspects of their students' appearance as well. Many schools banned: makeup, manicures, tattoos, greased hair, dyed hair, permed hair, hair below the eyebrows, facial hair, and hair styled in "unusual" ways (Schoolland 30–31).

Rules that governed appearance were not only for show. Enforcement could take many forms and be quite strict; at one school in Hakodate, for instance, students had surprise inspections for perms:

Without warning, all the girls are told to line up in the gym. Then a teacher goes down the rows with a bucket of water and a comb. When a

wet comb is run through a student's hair, you can tell if she has had a permanent. You can't tell by looking [...] because some of them naturally have wavy hair. So the teachers devised this way of uncovering violators. Those that violate the rules are pulled aside and have their hair cut on the spot. (Schoolland 26)

Similarly, at a girls school in Tokyo, those with irregular underwear (i.e. with polka-dots) were denounced by teachers in front of their peers as having the “mentality of bar hostesses.” At another school, a student was punished for having five pairs of eyelets on his shoes instead of the required six and in another for having pant legs that were one centimeter too long (Schoolland 23–24).

The requirement for students to maintain a “correct” image extended beyond school hours. Students, even when not at school, were expected to conform to a certain standard of decorum. In order to enforce this, teachers sometimes went on “spy duty”, pretending to shop at local department stores, or even peeking into discos in order to make sure students were maintaining a good image of themselves and their school. Teachers were also encouraged to ride local buses from time to time to make sure their students were not misbehaving on the bus. This was important “because the kids were wearing badges and uniforms,” and so “the school believed that its reputation rested with every kid's actions” (Schoolland 39).

Japanese tradition and culture, from the ritualized tea ceremony to the standardized process of job-hunting known as *shūkatsu*, is replete with various examples of an emphasis on strict, detail-oriented adherence to certain aesthetic procedures. Here, however, aesthetics is not simply a matter of self-justifying ritual, but instead, the means to carry forward an agenda. In other words, image is not simply created for the sake of image, it is created for the purpose of impressing others. Neat uniforms and disciplined,

polite, behavior are not just valued for their intrinsic worth, but because they create a positive image of the school in the local community. For both Emperor in the play and school administrators in Japan, clothing and appearance play a pivotal role in constructing the identity that is presented to the world. The school uniform, in specific, gains importance as it begins to symbolize the entire educational system. One misbehaving child in uniform can taint the image of the whole institution.

Some scholars and critics in both the US and Japan have objected to the strict rules and punishments that this emphasis on appearance gave rise to. Schoolland is one such writer who presents a revisionist backlash against the aforementioned hyperbolic praise which some Americans (like Rohlen) heaped on Japanese education. His and others' more critical appraisals attacked Japanese education's positive image, and were, of course, attacked in return. Negative critiques of Japanese education were themselves critiqued as overemphasizing differences between Japan and the United States and thereby perpetuating "a legacy of myths or exaggerated statements about Japanese education" (Cummings 296).

It is not my purpose here to take sides on the complex and extensive debate over the implications of specific educational policies and strategies. Instead, I point to the very existence of the debate as confirmation of the importance of the image of the Japanese educational system. Japanese educational officials were obsessed with the image of their educational system in much the same way as the Emperor was obsessed with his own image and clothing. This is because, for both the educators and the Emperor, much depended on what the world saw them to be.

Clothing Japanese Education: Bullying Cover-Ups

Every nation's educational system has its own strong and weak points and it is the decision of educators and administrators worldwide as to how to react to each. Japanese authorities fixated on maintaining their school's positive international and domestic image too often responded to the education system's actual problems by covering them up. This became clear over the course of various bullying scandals in which teachers, administrators, and even government officials responded to incidents of serious bullying by rehabilitating the school's image rather than its actual social environment. The Emperor spends most of the play covering up his internalized shame with layers of clothing and anonymity. Similarly, school authorities covered up their own guilt in layers of secrecy and organized fabrication. In the case of both the Emperor and the school system, this often ended up only worsening the situation.

Bullying (*ijime*) is "a problem that suffuses Japanese society, stretching from the classroom up to the office" (Kingston 117). In the 1980s, this issue came to the forefront when several middle and high-school students were bullied into committing suicide—a phenomenon known as "bullycide" (Yoneyama). These incidents were so controversial not only because of the bullying, but because of the cover-up. The story of Shikagawa Hirofumi, a middle schooler who lived near Tokyo, is a particularly disturbing example. Shikagawa was physically small, and he was subjected to various forms of humiliation. These included, most notably, a mock funeral, complete with incense and a condolence card signed by all of his classmates and four of his teachers. As the bullying grew more violent, his father repeatedly called the school, as well as the parents of some of his son's bullies, and the mother filed a complaint with the police department. These authorities,

however, continued to remain passive, and the bullying further escalated to the point where Shikagawa felt he had no choice but to commit suicide (Scholland 98).

Upon the boy's death, the school's principal claimed he had followed up on Shikagawa's parents requests, and everything possible had been done to protect their son. In less than a week, however, "the wall of secrecy broke" and it became clear that not only had Shikagawa not been defended, teachers had been complicit in his bullying (Scholland 99). As the scandal grew, administrators exerted tremendous pressure on teachers, demanding they defend the school's good image. Some students took advantage of this and exploited the teachers' situation to get away with bullying. They did this either by blackmailing teachers who had themselves participated in bullying, or by taking advantage of teachers' fear of reporting another bullying incident. Under pressure from the administration, teachers were so concerned with their own image that, even when, in one classroom, a student began pounding another student in the head and shouting, "You are another Shikagawa! Kill yourself like Shikagawa!" the teacher remained passive and permissive, hoping the incident would resolve itself and his image would remain untainted (Scholland 101). When the issue did not resolve itself, however, the teacher tried to redeem his image by claiming he had done everything he could (Scholland 102).

Once again, the cover-up was exposed, a protest was filed with the school board, and higher and higher circles of government became involved. The ruling Liberal Democratic Party sent a committee to investigate the school. Seven of the committee members stayed for forty-five minutes: fifteen minutes watching students arrive at the gate and thirty minutes listening to the official explanation by the principal about Shikagawa's death. It was painfully clear to those who observed these details that this

was not an earnest investigation but, rather, a publicity stunt. Thus, not only the school board, but the government, too, responded to scandal by seeking to correct the appearance of the problem rather than the problem itself (Schoolland 102).

Dissatisfied citizens responded by publicly ridiculing the authorities' inefficacy and lack of compassion. Someone sprawled graffiti reading "heartless brute" (*ninpinin*) on the wall next to the school entrance, literally defacing the façade the institution was working to maintain (Schoolland 102). By doing so, however, the anonymous critic reaffirmed the very same principle that the authorities upheld: image is everything.

Clothing Japanese Education: Conclusion

The international image of Japanese education influenced the international image of the Japanese nation. The local image of Japanese students likewise influenced the local image of the educational system. In both cases, appearance was therefore of primary importance. These two parallel processes of local and international image construction intersected, moreover, in the symbol of the school uniform. This ubiquitous garment had the power to both impress foreign educators with a particular image of Japanese education while simultaneously ensuring that the schoolchildren themselves conformed their physical bodies to that image. The image of the broken bodies "bullycide" victims threatened, however, the image of both the school system and the nation. Given this, it is perhaps unsurprising, though nevertheless unfortunate, that the popular response by authorities faced with bullying scandals was to cover up the problem rather than solve it. Reflected in the behavior of these authorities was, therefore, the conviction that the outward image of the educational system trumped its inner condition.

The King of La Mancha's Clothes has no classroom bullying or school uniforms, but it does have an ex-schoolteacher who is obsessed with clothing and image. This reflects similar behavior on the part of the school system. Both went to great lengths to present themselves according to the proper image, whether that meant policing hairstyle and covering up bullying incidents, or piling on layer after layer of clothing and double-checking that one is not naked.

One reason for this is because the Emperor lives in a world where appearance is equated with reality. This way of looking at the world arose from the Emperor's disgrace and disappearance ten years ago, and the story is recounted by the traveling player:

Ever since the Emperor paraded around, the way in which people look at things has been reduced to only one. "You can only believe what you can see." That's the way everyone looks at things now [...] "Let's only talk about real things", they said [...] For example, let's say that an ugly girl walks by in front of you. Everyone points at her and says, "Look how ugly that girl is!" [...] At first it was all right. Everyone had a good time laughing. But then a man with a bad leg came hobbling by. They all pointed at him. "Hey, that guy's deformed!" So then, a mother now comes in carrying her mentally-retarded child. And they couldn't stop any more. "That kid's a total loss!" they cried out. (198; 39–40)

In a world that focuses solely on what is visible, clothing takes on the preeminent role in shaping identity. If people only believe and talk about what they can see, one's physical identity grows to eclipse any sort of social or spiritual identity. Outward image trumps inner condition.

Schoolland concludes his discussion of American's fixation on ensuring "our team" beats "their team" on the economic playing field with a question: "Do the popular perceptions of both teams' activities square with reality?" (10). In other words, Schoolland asks the same question that the Emperor must face: beneath the constructed and carefully-clothed image, what is the naked truth?

Exposing Japanese Education: Nakedness as Materialism (Part I: The Play)

The Japanese word *miuri* is made up of the Chinese characters for “body” and “sell”. It has an intriguing array of meanings. The first definition to come up on the online Japanese-language dictionary Kotobank is: “to promise to work for someone for a specific period of time in exchange for an amount of money. Often used regarding prostitutes.” This is logical considering the word is a combination of “body” and “sell”; however, the second definition is more unexpected: “to sell over rights, privileges, or institutions to another in full. ‘I will *miuri* my factory in order to absolve my large debts’”. This second definition is also alluded to by George Fields in a book about the Japanese economy in which he defines *miuri* as “the usual term for sales of one company to another” (53). Why would these two, seemingly very different phenomena be described by the same word? Is it a coincidence, a joke, or are the ways that “bodies” of economic assets and “bodies” of women treated somehow related? And if so, what does that have to do with education, nakedness, or *The King of La Mancha’s Clothes*?

The relationship hinges on the theme of prostitution and its implications of nakedness. Prostitution is a major theme in both the play and the high-growth era and the 90s. Furthermore, it has peculiar connections to the education system. Prostitution also provides an example of female “bodies” being treated as “bodies” of economic assets. The play also connects prostitution with the theme of materialism. Nakedness, I will therefore, argue, acts as a catalyst for materialism, both within the play and the historical reality. Initially, however, I must begin with some important plot points and quotations from the play.

“We know any number of brothels. You can pay your expenses that way, you know” (200; 44) suggests the innkeeper’s wife to the travelling player in *The King of La Mancha’s Clothes*. The Player has been staying at the inn for weeks and is hopelessly in debt and unable to find any customers for his performance act. He is in further trouble with the management because his two children keep stealing from them. The Player’s efforts to curb his children’s disobedient behavior and force them to join him in his profuse apologies are to no avail. As his debt mounts and the children continue their defiance, the innkeeper’s wife demands that he pay up immediately and then leave. The overdue debt must be paid one way or another: “I don’t care if you have to sell your daughter to a brothel!” (196; 35). The Player is initially unwilling to consider this possibility, but soon his daughter reappears and is utterly unwilling to show remorse or sympathy for either her father or the people she has stolen from. Upon hearing the Wife’s suggestion, she also accuses her father of agreeing to sell her to a brothel and insults him to his face. Enraged, the Player finally threatens to fulfill her prediction (200; 45).

A few scenes later, the Girl reappears once more and flings money at her father, saying “You have to have money, right? Well, you were going to sell me off, weren’t you?” When her father asks her how she came by this cash, she replies:

You decided on prostitution, right? [...] I would certainly never go selling myself to a brothel. But I did pick up some customers myself! What I did was the most ordinary thing. I made lots more money than I would have from just performing in the street, the way my father taught me [...] So, is that a help, Mr. Innkeeper? If I go on for another week, I can pay everything back and even have some change left [...] I don’t want any debts with other people. (216; 87–88)

Thus, the Girl chooses to sell her body to absolve her debts in much the same way as the speaker in the *miuri* example sentence chooses to sell the “body” of his factory in order to

absolve his. Both the word *miuri* and the play thereby connect economic concerns with prostitution.

Following this incident, an argument ensues between the daughter who is determined to pay her debts, and the Innkeeper, who is determined to dissuade the Girl from prostitution. The debate showcases one of the major thematic conflicts of the play: traditional morality versus the logic of the market.

INNKEEPER: It's not a question of lending money. It's a question of how human beings lead their lives. Prostitution is outside the realm of possibilities.

GIRL: I don't remember getting any sermon from you.

INNKEEPER: Now just listen to me. Because I want to tell you something that is very important.

GIRL: I won't listen. After the sermon, I'll be forced to put something in the collection plate.

INNKEEPER: Don't talk nonsense. There are some things in the world that you can't just buy and sell. (*The GIRL blocks her ears.*) Hey, listen to what I am telling you.

GIRL: If I do listen, how much will you give me?

INNKEEPER: (*Now indignant.*) That's just about enough now[!]

GIRL: (*Glaring*) What is?

INNKEEPER: (*Pulling himself together*) Now, now, it was bad [for me] to shout [just now]....

GIRL: Yes, that was bad. So how about some consolation money?

INNKEEPER: Now....my girl, it's not like that, not at all. I mean, a human being....This world is not just made up of hostile people, and it's not just a question of gain and loss.... (*The GIRL laughs*) (216–17; 88–89)

Soon after this discussion, however, even the Innkeeper changes his mind, as the Girl exposes his secret in front of his Wife: the Innkeeper is a closeted homosexual (217; 89). With the naked truth about him revealed in such a traumatic way, and his relationship with his wife suddenly shattered, the Innkeeper completely loses his sense of compassion and switches both his philosophy and his attitude towards the Girl:

I will not forgive you [...] You can go to work for me right here [...] Starting tomorrow, I'm going to change my line of work [...] I'm going to start a little traveling show. And I'm going to show you off.

Dancing naked! [...] I completely take back everything I said before. What a fool I was when I believed in human compassion. The world rots and decays, and there is no way to change that. (218; 92)

In this way, time and time again, nakedness leads to the acceptance of the self-interested, profiteering logic of the market. The state of the world, with its lawlessness and materialism, is a direct result of the fiasco of Emperor's nakedness. The Innkeeper, likewise, ends up rejecting compassion and faith in favor of profit-seeking and prostitution when he, too, is exposed (albeit in a different way). This differs significantly from his behavior earlier in the play, when he referred to his challenges as a test "from God" and endeavored to maintain his moral values (210; 70). This all changes, however, as a result of his nakedness.

Notably, another dimension of the Girl's nakedness is that she juxtaposes it to art and claims it to be more profitable and well-suited to the age. Her reason is simple: art relies on imagination, which involves seeing what cannot be seen. Strip-teases, naked dancing, and other forms of pornography show "what actually exists". Thus, in a world of believing only "what you can see", pornography is of greater value than art. The Girl explains this to her father, the travelling player, as she begins stripping her clothing off piece by piece in front of all the alarmed adults who find themselves powerless to stop her:

Come on, take a good look, everybody. Look, Father! Now here's an art that's really popular! You took a long time to master your craft, but this is so much better at getting applause, and for making money, too. People will come for my performances. They love to come! (218; 94)

Her father had first alluded to this theme of the devaluation of art far earlier in the play. He described how, since the emperor left his throne, "the ones who have been made to suffer the most for all of this are the priests and the artists, like us. It's because we're both

selling things that can't be seen" (198; 40). Thus, in the world of believing only "what you can see", both artistic craftsmanship and religion and spirituality are devalued in favor of business and pornography. Another intriguing objection the Girl raises to religion, in particular, is that, after listening to a "sermon", she will be forced to put something in the "collection plate" (216; 88). This reaction on her part implies that she believes that, stripped down to its essential nature, religion is also about material profit.

Intriguingly, this philosophy that rejects religion and traditional morals is not actually without a "moral" value system of its own. While goading the Innkeeper to admit his previously closeted sexuality to his Wife, the Girl urges him: "Hey, Old Man, human beings have to live in a forthright manner" and when he soon responds by hitting the her in rage, she reacts: "Well, I just told the truth, didn't I? And I paid the money, so there was no reason that you should have hit me like that!" (217–18; 91–92). This reveals that, to the Girl's mind, her actions were justified. All she did was tell the truth, after all, and seems to feel this is always permissible no matter the consequences. What was *unjustified* was the Innkeeper's enraged reaction to hearing the truth: after all, it was the truth was it not? What right had he to punish the one who exposed him? Perhaps he deserved to be exposed; he had been lying this whole time, after all. In addition to this line of reasoning, the Girl also describes unpaid debts as undesirable. Thus, she substitutes a moral value system based on compassion and faith with one focused solely on brutal honesty and financial responsibility.

She is not the only one. Since far earlier in the play, the Innkeeper and his Wife have disagreed about nearly everything: the Innkeeper always takes the side of nobility and compassion, and his Wife always takes the side of economic pragmatism. When her

husband bewails the lawlessness and depravity of the times, she scolds him: “a really smart person, before he goes around moaning about the times, would simply adjust to them. You learn to move with the times, and for your own profit” (191; 22). When her husband objects to selling the Girl to a brothel, she tells everyone: “he is always this way, you know. When anything really critical happens [...] he leaves all the really tough stuff for me to handle” (211; 74).

It is notable that the two characters who most clearly symbolizes this philosophy of “the times” are both female while most of those who initially object to it are male. Three possible (potentially complementary) explanations exist for this. First: since the whole world is a dream in the mind of a schoolteacher who was betrayed by a female student, his subconscious mind is continuously manifesting selfish women as a reaction to his past betrayal by one. Second: it is a mirroring a historical trend of materialistic young Japanese women (discussed further in coming sections). Third: conscious or unconscious misogyny on the part of Yokouchi Kensuke gave the world yet another story where female characters are less morally upright than their male counterparts.

Whatever the case, the spirit and value system of “the times” (also referred to previously as “the logic of the market”) that is represented best by the Girl and the Wife impacts every character in the play. Some uphold it, some resist it, and some are converted to it. Time and time again, nakedness acts as a catalyst for its promotion. For the purpose of more easily analyzing and alluding to this value system that appears in the play, I have below distilled it into several summary statements. Some of them are almost direct quotes, while some of them were formulated through more indirect analysis.

Together, they form several important premises that the materialistic ideology presented by characters in the play upholds:

1. Only what can be seen exists
2. There is no value in endeavors that focus on what cannot be seen (i.e. art, religion) because what cannot be seen does not exist. Those who engage in these endeavors are probably just looking for profit like everyone else.
3. There is no harm in saying what is true even if it upsets people
4. Full recognition of the naked truth inevitably leads to rejection of the “lie” called faith (either in religion or in human decency)
5. Everything can be monetized
6. Pornography and prostitution are perfectly legitimate business methods
7. Compassion and forgiveness are futile; humans must put their own personal profit first
8. Proper human behavior centers around: sticking to the truth of cold, hard reality, and keeping one’s financial situation in order

The question therefore remains: how does this materialistic outlook mirror what was actually happening in Japan during the high-growth era and the 90s. And what does it all have to do with education?

Exposing Japanese Education: Nakedness as Materialism (Part 2: The Society)

“Male writers,” explains Funabashi Kuniko in her feminist critique of Japanese pornography, “describe the woman or girl’s body as a commodity, as if it were a toy” (Kingston 165). The commodification and objectification of the female body is nothing

new, historically speaking. It does, however, take on a special character in highly industrialized, capitalist nations such as Japan. This section will, therefore, discuss how Japan in the 80s and 90s reflects, in complex ways, the action of the play. In order to do this, I will connect the commodification of women's bodies, especially of schoolgirl's bodies, in the 80s and 90s to the materialistic ideology put forth in the play. Once again, nakedness will feature prominently and the education system will play a significant role.

Just like the setting of *The King of La Mancha's Clothes*, 80s and 90s Japan was a place where, according to some, everything could be monetized and pornography and prostitution were perfectly legitimate business methods. The parallels between play and society are clear. For example: in the same way that the girl in the play decides to sell her own female body for financial gain, magazines such as those Funabashi describe seek financial gain through selling the female body in image form.

The escalating capitalist, consumerist, economic growth of the period provides a backdrop for this trend. Many sectors of the Japanese economy thrived during the 70s and 80s. One such sector was the sex industry. Its magnitude during this period should not be underestimated. In the 90s, it accounted for one-percent of the nation's GDP. This was an amount roughly equivalent to Japan's defense budget at the time (Kingston 77). The prevalence of the sexualized female body as part of the consumer landscape was such that "nude photos of women and sexual drawings" were, in one reporter's words, "routinely carried by tabloid newspapers" which were read by "men in public often on commuter trains in plain view of children and women" (Kageyama).

Here, unfortunately, is where childhood (and by extension, adolescent education) re-enters the picture. Throughout the 90s, Japan was the largest market of child pornography in the world (Barr). In fact, according to Interpol, 80% of all internet child pornography originated from Japan (Watts). So pervasive was the sexual fascination with children, especially young girls, that the word “Lolita Complex” (*rori-kon*) was coined to describe it (Winge 47).

But why did this trend appear? One theory explained this growing fascination with younger girls by postulating that women’s empowerment and entrance into the workplace had caused men to seek the docility and obedience traditionally associated with the femininity in younger and younger girls. Another, “less analytical theory” is simply that legal regulation remained lax until 1999, and the industry grew mostly because it could (Lev; Watts). Yet another interpretation connects the fixation with young girls with the very practice of objectification and commodification of the female body itself. Yamamoto Naohide, director of the Japan Institute for Research in Education and the Culture of Human Sexuality asserts that “Japanese men don’t think about human rights or anything else related to women; [men] look at [women] as objects [...] If you think of it that way, then the younger and purer the better” (Lev). Such a viewpoint is consonant with the views of characters in the play who hold that everything can be monetized and that compassion and forgiveness are futile and humans must put their own personal profit first. And just as in the play, as a result of this ideology, young girls end up naked.

Yet, the connections between the *King of La Mancha’s Clothes* and the Japanese sex industry (especially the portion involving young women) run deeper than this. The

link is, once again, education. The dreamer who dreams most of the events in the play is, as previously mentioned, an ex-public-school-teacher. Dreaming himself as the Emperor with no clothes and his Fool, he is constantly preoccupied with the idea of clothing and nakedness. Further, he is disturbed when, at one point during the dream, a young woman (The Girl) begins to remove her clothing for money. Viewed in this light, the following description of a Tokyo video-game parlor in the 90s gains new significance:

Players with 80 cents to spend can battle villains with karate chops, or they can strip the high school uniform from a teenager until she is topless.

“I wasn’t lucky,” says the computer-generated image of a girl of about 14, as she bares herself to three boys who had just won a round of video mahjong at a Tokyo game center. When the boys lose, they get only a tantalizing flash of skin before she reappears dressed for school.

The Japanese high school uniform—for girls it is a sailor top and short skirt—is a symbol of the nation’s commitment to education. But the sailor suit also has become a tawdry prop used by a society that has a predilection for turning girls into sex objects. (Lev)

The protagonist of the play is an ex-teacher, and thus he is connected with the Japanese educational system. And the Japanese educational system and its young participants were, during this period, symbolically connected with the Japanese sex industry. This connection was certainly not an institutional one, but rather a cultural one derived from overlapping connotations. The connection finds its clearest expression, as stated above, in the image of the high school girl’s uniform: a glorified symbol of education, and also a fetishized symbol of sexual objectification.

The transformation of the school uniform into a “prop” for sexual fantasies formed part of a broader pop cultural phenomenon during this period: the fad of the high-school girl. An important piece of vocabulary in this discussion is the term *kogaru*: an amalgamation of the Japanese prefix *ko* (evoking smallness, as in *kodomo*, the word for

child) and *garu*, a Japanese pronunciation of the English word “girl”. Tadashi Suzuki and Joel Best provide analysis of the meaning of this term:

Kogaru should not be understood as simply a demographic category, as referring to all girls of high-school age. Rather, the word designates a recognizable “social type” [...], analogous to such American social types as “yuppie” or “soccer mom” [...] distinguished by age, sex, and styles of dress, grooming, and consumption. (62)

Thus, this very form of social grouping, as with many subcultures in capitalist societies, was at least partially defined by capitalist consumption patterns. *Kogaru* were important both as trendsetters for consumption of fashion and accessories and as objects of consumption for men in search of a sexual thrill.

The word *kogaru* came into vogue in the 90s as this “social type” began to rise in influence. Japanese popular magazines such as *SPA!* and *Dime* printed articles about *kogaru* beginning in 1989, and the late-night TV show *M10* ran a special program called “The Kogaru Night” on 5 August 1993. As the decade progressed, the word came into greater and greater usage and certain consumer goods (i.e. snack foods and personal accessories) experienced an unexpected economic boom as a result of becoming associated with the spreading *kogaru* fad. As attention grew, coverage in some popular media “depicted high-school girls as in the forefront of Japanese popular culture in the 1990s” (Suzuki and Best 73). So influential did the popular image become that “many intellectuals suggested that the concept ‘high-school girl’ had itself become a kind of unofficial brand label” (Suzuki and Best 63).

Kogaru received news coverage not only as pop culture trendsetters, but also as sexual deviants. This sexual deviance took multiple forms and was not limited to prostitution by its traditional definition. One common practice was *enjo-kōsai*, or

compensated dating, in which a man pays a woman for romantic intimacy (this often, but not always, involves some sort of sexual intimacy). While women of various ages may engage in *enjo-kōsai*, the subcategory of *joshi-kōsei* refers specifically to compensated dating with high-school girls. Clubs that were aimed specifically at facilitating compensated dates between patrons and *kogaru* began to appear in Tokyo in the 90s (Suzuki and Best 72).

Another form of *kogaru* sexual deviance that came to public attention in the 90s was *burusera*: the selling of personal clothing worn by a *kogaru*. *Burusera* shops sold both *kogaru*'s underwear, and, for a more expensive price, their entire school uniform. In some cases, *kogaru* took off their clothing in the shop to prove to patrons that it was authentic (Suzuki and Best 72). Thus, once again, the high school uniform acts as a powerful symbol at the intersection of consumption, education, clothing, nakedness, and prostitution.

This association between consumerism and prostitution deepens in the light of reports that *kogaru* were engaging in their assorted sexual activities because they were desperate for spending money (Suzuki and Best 62). Unlike traditional prostitutes in Japan, these high school girls were often from middle-class backgrounds and they used their earnings to “purchase expensive designer clothes and accessories and pay their *keitai* (mobile phone) bills” (Kingston 118). Thus, the agenda of materialism and consumerism that motivated patrons to buy the nakedness and sexual services of high-school girls also motivated those same high-school girls to voluntarily provide those services.

Just like the Girl in *The King of La Mancha's Clothes*, many of these young women would rather take control of selling their own bodies themselves than surrendering to a brothel. Sexually deviant *kogaru* became, therefore, incorporated as a feature of the consumer landscape as ubiquitous as the pornographic magazines that depicted them. Nozawa Shigeru, director of the Juvenile Division of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department during the 80s, described how, in the past, police used to raid *yakuza* brothels; however, “recently they were finding more and more girls who were hanging around game centers and discos waiting to be picked up. Half of them had initiated sexual contact with men” (Schoolland 43). Just like the Girl in *The King of La Mancha's Clothes*, these schoolgirls did not need the direct supervision of an older pimp in order to come to the decision to commodify their bodies as economic assets in order to achieve financial gain.

In the play, the Girl decides, on her own, to prostitute herself, yet the Emperor (ex-schoolteacher) feels somewhat responsible. Why is this? The prevalence of *joshi-kōsei* and *burusera* among high-school girls shows provides clear evidence of a link between the educational system (symbolized by the Emperor) and the sex industry (symbolized by the Girl) during this period, but this hardly means educational authorities were responsible for this link, does it? Or could there possibly factors within the education system that actually contribute to the objectification and consumption of the high-school girl's body? The following account by Schoolland, who conducted research with Japanese public school teachers and students, sheds light on this possibility:

“One of my students put it bluntly,” recounted the teacher.
 “‘School is for stupid girls. It doesn't matter if I study or not since I can't do better than become a clerk anyway.’ Love or romance seems to be the only excitement for so many of them.

“I’m getting tired of hearing them say that their life is practically meaningless. When I ask them to tell me what their hobby is, they say, ‘to listen to records’ or ‘to sleep’.” (41)

This girl who claimed she cannot “do better than become a clerk” may well have been correct.

Japanese society during this period (and still today, to some degree) placed much emphasis on women’s role in the home, and their leadership in the workplace was therefore noticeably uncommon (Kingston 70–72). Women’s economic and social rights in Japan have steadily made progress since the Second World War, especially in terms of legislation, but the actual situation in the 80s and the 90s was still very clearly unequal (Kingston 72). Near the end of the millennium, almost forty percent of working women in Japan were part-time, non-standard workers on the periphery of the employment system and the wage gap was so wide that women earned only slightly more than half of what men earned (Schoolland 41; Kingston 72). The fact that, until 1999, newspapers posted job openings in separate, gendered sections provides further evidence for the intentionality of this double-standard (Kingston 74).

Japan is a capitalist nation where children are educated in a system that prepares them to grow up to become economic actors and achieve career success. As previously discussed, many argue that educational systems play a significant role in a nation’s economy by preparing future workers to contribute to it (Rohlen 29; Schoolland 9; Cummings 293). When half of the Japanese population is, however, held back by social and economic gender inequality, is it surprising that some may turn to consumerism, pop culture, and even sexual deviancy as alternatives? The majority of high-school girls in Japan during the period likely did not identify as *kogaru*, or sell their bodies through

joshi-kōsei, *burusera*, or prostitution. Nevertheless, it is of little doubt that the sexism of the educational system and the workplace combined with the materialistic consumerism of the society contributed to the rise in the numbers of those who did.

High school girls, such as the one described above, embody a materialistic belief similar to that elucidated in *The King of La Mancha's Clothes*. That is, full recognition of the naked truth (in this case, of the gendered workplace), inevitably leads to rejection of the 'lie' called faith (in this case, faith in one's own future career prospects). Some girls may then accept another materialistic premise set forth in the play, that proper human behavior centers around sticking to the truth of cold, hard reality, and keeping one's financial situation in order. This would explain why, when unable to pursue orthodox routes to wealth, one pursues it by unorthodox routes. If the girl then accepts another of the play's premises—that pornography and prostitution are perfectly legitimate business methods—then these appear as attractive money-making activities. Lastly, some male consumers accept the materialistic premise put forth in the play that compassion and forgiveness are futile and humans must put their own personal profit first. This justifies buying into a practice of objectification, even when this objectification sometimes leads to violence, inequality, and the violation of women's and children's human rights.

In this way, the materialistic value system of *The King of La Mancha's Clothes*¹⁴ explains the activity of *kogaru* and even carries broader implications for the sex industry in Japan (and likely other nations) as well. In summary, recognition of the naked truth of a world where only what can be seen exists leads to physical nakedness and selling of the

¹⁴ I would like to clarify that when I state that *The King of La Mancha's Clothes*, “presents”, “puts forward” or “elucidates” a materialistic value system, this does not mean that the play promotes it. Rather, certain characters in the play adopt it, and through their observing their behavior, the audience is able to reflect upon this materialistic value system and its implications.

female body in order to achieve economic benefit. This is true both in the historical reality and the play. In both, materialism and nakedness inevitably result from each other.

Exposing Japanese Education: Nakedness as Absolution (Part 1: The Teacher)

“I must strip off my clothing, impregnated with lies...and so, then I can face the truth” announces the Emperor in Scene 7 of the *King of La Mancha’s Clothes* (220; 99). Nakedness, the very thing he has been avoiding, is inevitably unavoidable. The play follows the dramatic trope of “Chekhov’s Gun”: when a “gun” (in this case, the “gun” is a deep personal fear) is shown to the audience in the beginning of the play, it must be fired (this fear must be faced) later in the play (Goldberg 163). If the exposition and rising action of the play sets up a premise that the Emperor is most afraid of being naked, maximum dramatic impact in the climax of the play can be achieved through the Emperor’s nakedness. Within the context of the plot, moreover, the Emperor’s traumatic fall from grace and subsequent shame was the result of his appearing naked in front of his subjects. He has, thus, since this time, been running from both his guilt and his nakedness. Therefore, in order to face his guilt and overcome it, he must also face and overcome his fear of nakedness. In addition, he must disclose to the people of his kingdom his true identity as the long-lost Emperor who is responsible for the kingdom’s downfall. This would fulfill the dramatic principle of “Chekhov’s Gun”.

In order to be absolved, The Emperor must reveal himself both literally and metaphorically: by baring both his identity and his body. In a parallel universe, the ex-schoolteacher (whose mind the Emperor is a manifestation of) was also disgraced by the emotional nakedness of having his intimate letter-writing affair with a student exposed.

And thus, in that universe too, he must, naked and unprotected, face his past if he is to move on to a better future.

The Emperor finally makes the decision to confront his fears as a result of the people around him succumbing, one by one, to the aforementioned materialistic way of thinking. Through the course of the play, each hopeful or compassionate adult character is transformed into a bitter and cynical one by the unrelenting greed and cruelty of the children—those who grew up in the era after the Emperor left his throne. The climax is reached when the Girl begins to do her strip tease in front of all the other characters. The Servant, Fool, and her own father, the Player, are all powerless to stop her. The Innkeeper and his Wife, moreover, are both ready to exploit her nakedness for their own financial benefit. There is no one who can intervene to change the course of events but the Emperor. At the last second, as the Girl is about to take off her underwear (like a *kogaru* in a *burusera* shop or an animated schoolgirl in a video-game parlor), the he does just that, interjecting and stopping her.

Addressing the Innkeeper, who has said he will show the Girl off, dancing naked, in order that she may repay her debts to him, the Emperor offers himself up in her stead:

Mr. Innkeeper, there is still another who can draw greater crowds than this little girl here. If you exhibit this person, this little girl's dancing could never match that success. Get this person to come to your little tent. And in recompense, pardon this little girl. [...] This is the most famous, and the most foolish man in the entire country. And this man....(*No one can speak*) is me. (*Pause*)

So then have you all forgotten my face? Ten years ago, I was the butt of your cruel laughter, all over the country. I was the Emperor who sowed the seeds of every possible disaster, the Emperor with no clothes! (*No one speaks*)

You surely understand what I am saying. All of these offenses are mine. So there is no one who can make all the others laugh as much as I can, if I dance naked for your little show. And it's fine if they choose to laugh only at me. There is no need for inflicting more wounds on each

other. Or to hate each other. When someone wants to laugh, or inflict a wound, all they have to do is to come to your little show and pay a visit to me. I will dance. And I'll be the naked one, not this little girl, standing in front of the customers [...]

There is now just one thing I must do. One more time, I must stand up in front of these children. I must stand up, naked, because it is necessary that I be laughed at. Laughed at and laughed at, until the children are exhausted from laughing, until they can laugh no longer....until they will forgive me. I must continue on, naked, continue on [...] I must be naked....I must strip off my clothing, impregnated with lies....and so, then I can face the truth.... (220; 97-99)

In this way, the Emperor places the responsibility for the rise of materialism within his kingdom squarely on his own shoulders and thereby summons the courage to try to atone for his past.

It is noteworthy that the Emperor, an adult male, arises to take this responsibility, despite the fact that the women and children within the play most often embody the materialistic ideology. This hinges on themes of generation. The dialogue indicates that the reason the Wife, an adult female character, embodies the materialistic ideology of the age is because of the children of that age. The Player's disobedient children have driven the Wife to become continuously suspicious and hostile towards strangers by continuously stealing the bread she bakes and sell it on the black market (195; 32).

Combined with their other delinquent behavior, it is the younger generation who appear to be most clearly embodying the selfish, materialistic spirit of the times.

Why then, would the patriarch of the older generation be the one to atone for the younger generation's behavior? Two explanations come to mind: a narrower one, and a broader one. In a narrower sense, it could be because the Emperor used to be a high-school teacher, and was, at that time, responsible for the behavior of the younger generation that comprises his students. In a broader sense, the Emperor is an adult, and

should be responsible for those who grow up in a world controlled by adults. The Servant summarizes this second explanation clearly:

Those kids are twisted in their outlook because it's the temper of the times. But it isn't the kids who have made the world this way, it's the adults. So the ones who should get the punishment are the adults who made the world this way [...] It's not just one single person. All of us, so many of us, are involved. (203; 51–52)

This deterministic explanation—that misbehaving adolescents are enacting large-scale diffuse social trends that are the fault of adults—is echoed in analyses of the historical period of Japan in the 90s. The rise of materialism and various social ills and the decline of traditional values was widely decried during this period (Kingston 117). Critics pointed not only to issues such as prostitution and *enjo-kōsai*, but also to other problems that tormented the educational system such as bullying, suicide, and truancy. Some of these issues, such as bullying, were not necessarily new, but were rather subjects of newly-aroused public attention. Others, such as truancy and *enjo-kōsai* were actually on the rise. Therefore, both actual and perceived increase in the severity and widespread nature of various social issues lead to an atmosphere of national introspection. In this respect, many came to a similar conclusion as the Servant: “that this behavior [materialism, exploitation of women, etc.] is an emulation of what is widely evident in society” (Kingston 117–118).

This connection of microcosmic social ills to large-scale social trends is clearly present in the academic discussion of bullying. One explanation posits that “the real issue behind bullying among school students is the rise of the ‘logic of the powerful’ in society” (Yoneyama). Taking the discussion to an even larger scale, some have blamed “globalisation dominated by US-style neoliberalism, which advocates unlimited free-

market competition, coupled with neoconservatism, the political philosophy that upholds traditional values, limited welfare and the interventionist approach to international affairs to maximise national interest” (Yoneyama). In this way, behavior of national governments, economies, and whole populations is implicated in the discussion of causal factors in the microcosm of bullying.

One particular example relevant to *The King of La Mancha's Clothes* is that of bullying by teachers. Fujiwara Tomomi, a critic and writer, describes the means by which some teachers utilize bullying as a method of classroom management:

When a homeroom teacher cannot be the pivot of the class, the atmosphere of the class becomes permanently unstable. Such a class is in need of a clown. The model to follow can be found in variety-shows in television, which revolve around a clown – the bullied – who is constantly laughed at each time s/he screams at being poked and pushed. The class follows the same power dynamics. To ‘read the vibes’ means to grasp instantaneously the role to be played by each individual, to select a victim, and to direct the whole scene. The skill to operate ‘vibes’ can be regarded as a ‘petit-fascism’ in contemporary society. Some teachers have fallen into using this technique as it is an easy way to manage a class. Thus bullying has become a method. (Yoneyama)

All this occurs in a society where students are continually reminded that bullying is wrong. This message, broadcast in school assemblies and even by floats in parades, stands at odds with some teachers’ actual behavior (Schoolland 57).

Hypocrisy on the part of teachers does not end there: many teachers in the 80s hit their students as punishment for rule-breaking despite the fact that corporal punishment in the classroom was in itself against the law. This practice of “breaking the laws to enforce the rules” was coupled with other hypocritical behaviors, such as teachers smoking while forbidding their students to do so, or teachers sporting hairstyles that students were disciplined for having. In this situation, “the astute pupil comes to the conclusion that the

lesson on decent, reasoning human behavior does not apply to people with great power” (Schoolland 58). In this way, full recognition of the naked truth of the “logic of the powerful” inevitably leads to rejection of the “lie” called faith in the power of ethics and of the moral integrity of the school system. This once again echoes the materialistic ideology described in the play.

One result of the wide publicity of bullying scandals was that adolescents themselves discovered the broader “adult” society was guilty of creating the conditions that led to adolescent violence. In 2006, the head official of the Ministry of Education and Science received a letter from a student who threatened suicide from bullying and felt his only hope was to appeal to the highest educational authority possible. This student felt strongly that adults, as a general category, were to blame for his difficulties, and that they would all attempt to save face and avoid taking responsibility. In a portion of his letter addressed to his classmates, he stated:

I saw on the TV that bullies went with teachers, the principal and board of education to destroy evidence, tell lies and say that there was no *ijime* [bullying]. No bullies take responsibility. It’s the fault of adults. You may think that you’ll be protected by adults, but you’re wrong.
(Yoneyama)

To his class teacher, he wrote:

You’re no different from bullies. I’ll hold a grudge against you forever and will never forgive you. When I die, you’ll tell lies on TV. You’ll definitely say that ‘there was no *ijime*’ or ‘there is no causal relationship between *ijime* and suicide’ [...] I can’t trust you. So I’ve decided to write to the Minister. Other teachers are the same. I can’t trust teachers. (Yoneyama)

In the portion to his parents, he concludes with the words: “I’m going to die because of the bullies, teachers, the principal, and the board of education [...] They’ll all try to avoid responsibility as I saw on TV. I can see that and I hate them” (Yoneyama). It is notable

that the majority of this list is not fellow students, but adults, some of which are adults he has never even met. This young boy and others, therefore, demanded an apology for the problems that afflict youth not from other youth, but from the adults and institutions who structured the world that youth were socialized into. Their outcry was one demanding both change, and the acceptance of responsibility.

The King of La Mancha's Clothes presents an image of a schoolteacher apologizing naked, and this image is of great symbolic significance in this social atmosphere. It shows an adult, an institutional figure, no less, accepting responsibility and completely divesting himself of every sort of lie that could protect him. When the Emperor says, "I must strip off my clothing, impregnated with lies...and so, then I can face the truth" (220; 99) he is speaking not simply as a character in a play, but as an adult and a patriarch in a society where adults and patriarchs often deny their guilt.

In 1986, a teacher so overzealously disciplined a student that he killed him. The news story broke, and one anonymous letter to a newspaper read: "I wonder how the ex-teacher will live for the rest of his life. He will have to live for tens of years, expiating [his] crime [...] and frightened by the shadows of his act" (Schoolland 7). While the protagonist in *The King of La Mancha's Clothes* simply cut one of his student's faces, rather than killing her, the play in many ways answers the letter-writer's question: the ex-teacher will wander through a dream in a restless search for atonement.

Following the announcement that he will atone for his past as the Emperor with no clothes, the Emperor first strips off all of his medieval clothing to reveal himself in a modern business suit. No sooner has this occurred than a totally new character, Nakagawa Kyōko, appears and announces she is the now-grown-up woman who the

schoolteacher hurt all those years ago. The Emperor comes face to face with the reality that he is actually a ex-schoolteacher, not an Emperor, and the rest of the dream characters drop their disguises and reveal themselves to be the ex-schoolteacher's other grown-up ex-students. They appear to be about to accept his absolution, telling him:

Look, sir. There's no scar left at all! [...] I came here so that you could see my face. Look carefully. That scar has completely vanished. So you don't have to worry about it any more. You don't have to go around any more on that desolate plain. You are pardoned! (225; 111)

Kyōko appears to give the Emperor what he most desires: absolution. Her reason is that the injury is no longer visible (the motif of image reappears). The only character who casts doubt on this rosy scene of absolution is the Fool, who has not transformed into a character from the Emperor's past, but is still the Fool. He tells the Emperor: "You're not pardoned at all [...] That's an absolute lie!" (225; 112).

The reason for this becomes clear: the Emperor has not truly yet faced the truth. Kyōko has told him that she was cut because he pushed her against a window, the glass shattered, and a piece of glass cut her face. The Fool reveals that, in fact, it was an intentional act carried out with a knife, not an accidental result of a shattered window. Following this, the Emperor fulfills the prophecy of the letter-writer that the ex-teacher would be "frightened by the shadows of his act". In other words, he turns on the Fool, who, all this time, has been shadowing him. The following exchange occurs:

EMPEROR: Get rid of him [The Fool] someplace! [...] He...he made me suffer. He knew how to follow me around, and in a sneaky, clever way, to persecute me. It was him who drove me to that blasted heath!
 FOOL: Hey, wait a minute [...] Do you know who I really am?
 EMPEROR: Of course I know. You're my shadow. And ever since you actually appeared before me, my suffering began. Disappear! Vanish from before my eyes!
 FOOL: (*Afraid*) You must realize that I am you.

EMPEROR: Listen, anyone has two or three parts of his personality that he'd like to kill off. [...] Someone make him vanish from my sight! [...] Now I've learned the truth. From now on, I don't need a shadow! (226–27; 114–15)

Following this exchange, the Fool leaves in dejection and the Emperor returns to the scene of absolution.

As a gift, the ex-students give him a box inside which is a new set of clothes. He cannot see this new set of clothes. Yet, at the prompting of the students, who he is now sure have forgiven him, he puts them on. Now, of course, he is naked. In one of the most gripping sequences of the play, the students and the Emperor smile at each other, the smile swells into a group laugh, and then suddenly the atmosphere turns cold, Kyōko points at the Emperor and shouts, “The Emperor has no clothes! He's naked!” and the students begin to point and laugh at the Emperor once more. The Emperor does not understand the truth until too late. While outwardly, the characters around him appeared to be his past students, ready to absolve him, inwardly, they were just more manifestations of his ongoing nightmare (228; 121–22).

Exposing Japanese Education: Nakedness as Absolution (Part 2: The Fool)

In reality, the only way the ex-schoolteacher can be absolved is not through his students' forgiveness but through his own. More accurately, he must forgive his inner fool. As previously alluded to, the Emperor and the Fool are both manifestations of the mind of the same ex-schoolteacher. For most of the play the Fool (in the style of a true Shakespearean fool) provides commentary, suggestions, and quips, and the Emperor acts as the protagonist. Once again, in the style of a true Shakespearean fool, the Fool is also, strangely enough, the most well-informed. Following the false-absolution-turned-

nightmare, the action returns to the real world in the invalid teacher's bedroom and the audience discovers an important piece of information: it is in fact the Fool who is the true embodiment of the dreaming ex-schoolteacher and the Emperor who is a character from the dream, not vice versa, as previously assumed (229; 123). As summarized by the Emperor: "it wasn't you who were really the shadow, it seems to have been me" (230; 130).

True absolution can only come to the schoolteacher, therefore, by reuniting the two halves of himself: his Emperor and his Fool. But before that, of course, the theme of nakedness must reappear. Previously, it was assumed that nakedness on the part of the Emperor would atone to his subjects for his past disgrace, and in parallel, nakedness on the part of the ex-teacher would atone to his students for his past misconduct. The Fool, who warned the Emperor against such an action, and told the Emperor that this was a trap, appeared to present only an obstacle and a lie. Now, however, it becomes clear that the Fool was in fact speaking the truth; it was a trap, and the Emperor's nakedness has in fact not absolved him. As it turns out, the real fool was the Emperor.

So who must really be naked in order to be absolved? The Fool who speaks the truth, or the Emperor who is a fool? The choice is made for the characters. Soon, the Nurse re-enters, forcibly strips the Fool (ex-schoolteacher), wipes him down with a wet towel, dries him off, and dresses him in fresh clothes. Following this, the Fool and the Emperor finally reunite, embrace, and the play ends with their agreement to work together to stop running from their fear of nakedness and instead start a new journey. Their new journey is to look for the Emperor's new clothes: the ones that foolish people cannot see. The Emperor remembers feeling them on his body, thus he is sure they did, in

fact, exist, yet the crowds' foolishness prevented the crowd from seeing them. Thus, the Emperor appeared naked, but was, in reality, not. His outer appearance was not his true inner condition. The problem with finding these clothes is, of course, that both the Fool and Emperor are too foolish to see them (231; 131–133).

In this way, the play ends with these two characters embarking on an impossible dream (like Don Quixote's): finding clothes that they cannot see (231; 133). Is there any parallel for this in Yokouchi's society? The ending reflects not so much a concrete force already present in the 90s, but rather Yokouchi's recommendation for what he believes his society needs: an honest look at itself, an acceptance of its own responsibility, and even foolishness, and forward movement to find some new intangible value system to replace materialism.

Exposing Japanese Education: Conclusion

If theatre "mirrors the spirit of the time" then *The King of La Mancha's Clothes* carries a number of powerful critiques of the high-growth era and the 90s. The play weaves together themes of appearance, clothing, nakedness, materialism, and responsibility to form a complex picture of the crisis in Japanese education (and by extension, many aspects of Japanese society) during this period. Central to this picture are patriarchal authority (primarily, of the teacher), prostitution, and conflict between older and younger generations. In sum total, the play and the historical record together tell the following story:

Rising materialism renders image ever more important, as only what can be seen can be believed in. Thus, the image of education becomes exceedingly important as it drives international initiatives, is enforced through dress codes, and is the first priority in

bullying scandals. Nakedness carries the greatest appearance of truth in a world where only what can be seen exists. It functions, moreover, as a source of both commodification and of absolution. It is linked to the commodification of the women's bodies, especially schoolgirls' bodies, as objects of sexual desire. Also, paradoxically, it is linked to the admission of one's past guilt and the divestiture of lies and cover-up schemes. The Emperor echoes the actions of educational authorities: routinely seeking to evade the naked truth of their past or their misconduct by covering it up with layers of lies and clothing.

Consequently, the warmly-dressed Emperor's folly and evasion of responsibility cause the world of the play to plunge into a darkness in which young boys grow up thieves and young girls grow up prostitutes. As authorities and adults continue to pile on more and more layers of lies to cover up their insecurities, weak points, and shame, youth react with determination to strip these off. This conflict between clothing and nakedness is played out in the symbolism of the high school girl's uniform. Inevitably, high school girls, both real and imaged, strip off their uniform as a direct consequence of market forces and an indirect consequence of educational forces. The adults and patriarchs responsible are careful to cover their guilt.

This changes when the Emperor (ex-schoolteacher) takes responsibility upon himself as an adult and a patriarch. He acts against the trend, accepts responsibility for his past, and volunteers to strip in the young girl's stead. Yet his nakedness can only result in absolution when he forgives himself. In the end of the play, he unites with his inner fool, and goes on a search for a new garment: one that cannot be seen, but only felt. In this way, the play ends with a recommendation to Japanese society: forgive yourself,

face your past foolishness and shame, and move forward to reject materialism. Define yourself not by what is visible, but by what is not.

CHAPTER 3: CYCLICAL TIME AND REPEATING HISTORY IN BOTH PLAYS AND BOTH ERAS

Cyclical Time on the Dramatic Stage: Introduction

In previous chapters, I have demonstrated the complex interconnections between *The Little Match Girl* and *The King of La Mancha's Clothes* and the “spirit” of their respective time periods. I have also demonstrated how they both, beyond simple passive reflection, actively offer meaningful commentary on their time periods. Much of these interconnections and commentaries center on issues related to patriarchal (or imperial) authority, prostitution, and inter-generational conflict. These issues each present themselves in forms unique to their time period; however, these are all issues that also transcend time period. This suggests there is value in a closer examination of the theme of time within and between both plays and the historical periods they draw from. Do the plays make statements strictly limited to their time period? Or do they make statements about both their time period and about the nature of time itself? Further, how do the plays’ commentaries on time mirror those occurring during the historical decade in which they were written?

In both *The Little Match Girl* and *The King of La Mancha's Clothes*, time is presented as cyclical just as often as it is presented as linear. In other words, some of the action and language within the play implies permanent change, but much of it implies repetition and cyclical time: events recur, themes reappear, and states remain continuous. Language and imagery that creates a sense of cyclical time runs through both plays. This is important because it implies two things. First, it implies that the plays are presenting

their stories not as commentary that is limited to its time period, but as one with universal implications. Second, it implies that some of those living in Japan during the time periods the plays were written actually felt, at those times, that history was repeating itself.

Cyclical Time on the Dramatic Stage: Nature as Cyclical Time (Part I: The Little Match Girl)

Sunrise and sunset, spring and fall, adolescence and old-age: each follows the other, and each is followed by the other. Meteorological, seasonal, and biological processes involve the repetition of certain actions and states at regular intervals, and thereby imply a cyclical sense of time. Seasons, additionally, occupy a position of great importance in traditional Japanese culture as literary and artistic symbols (Shirane xiii). Japanese theatre, including modern theatre, operates within this scientific and cultural context. Thus, the many allusions to time of day and season within *The Little Match Girl* take on significant implications about the play's depiction of time itself. They evoke a sense of cyclical time and of primal and ahistorical reality.

Various characters in *The Little Match Girl* repeatedly reference winter and its corresponding symbols of cold and snowfall. These images appear in both the voice-over that tells the modified version of the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale and in the action of the characters onstage. At the very beginning of the play, the voice-over describes the setting for the audience: "it was the last night of the year, New Year's Eve, and it was very cold. It had already become dark, and snow was falling" (27; 5). Cyclical time is referenced here in three ways: mention of an annual holiday (New Year's Eve), the season (winter—indicated through snow and cold), and the time of day (night—indicated

through darkness). All three of these—annual holidays, seasons, and times of day—recur according to cycles. From the start, therefore, the play is anchored not in historical time (i.e. “It was 31 December 1946 at 7pm...”) but in ahistorical time (“It was the last night of the year, New Year’s Eve, and it was very cold...”). Beginning the play “It was the last night of the year” frees the audience from the conscious associations of any one specific year: it could be this year, last year, next year, or many years ago. It may not even matter.

The theme of winter (and of New Year’s Eve) is further emphasized by the use of sensory details in the play’s language. The voice-over describes how “the snow came drifting down on the back of [the Little Match Girl’s] neck, to fall among the beautiful curls of her long golden hair” and that “from every window the light was shining, and there was the strong and savory smell of a goose roasting” (32; 11). When the older man tries to make small talk, he asks: “outside...was it snowing?” and follows up by asking if it is “powdered” snow (33; 12).

Snow appears again as the older man tries haltingly to remember the lyrics to a popular song he wants his wife to sing: “Try that song... ‘The snow is... (*Trying to remember.*) The snow is... (*Thinking.*) The snow is getting deeper...no *keeps* getting deeper....” (34; 13)¹⁵. The characters explicitly mention snow one final time as the younger woman describes her long journey to see her parents: “We walked a long way. It was very cold. Snow was falling [...] Just for one look at Father and Mother...that’s all we were thinking....” (45; 26).

¹⁵ Emphasis and stage directions in original.

The characters mention cold, another sign of winter, even more often than they mention snow. It is most commonly referred to by the voice-over that tells the fairy tale. The voice describes how the shoeless feet of the little match girl were “purple and swollen” from the cold (27; 5). When she crouched down in a small space between houses, “she could not escape the cold” (32; 11). When she tried “to warm her freezing hands” by striking a match, she only ended up “crouching all alone on the cold stone pavement, with the wind blowing, freezing” (45; 26). In the end:

The New Year’s morning sun illuminated that little body. One hand held a bunch of matches, almost entirely burned up. People said, “She must have tried to warm herself...” It was true. This child had been very cold. (51; 33)

“Cold” is, in the English translation, the very last word in the play. In the Japanese, “cold” (*samukatta*) is not literally the last word, however the only words following it are a particle (*no*) and a copula (*desu*). If these words were not included, the sentence would express a different formality level, but would have exactly the same intended meaning. “Cold” is, therefore, the final thought in both versions.

Cold also appears as a theme in the dialogue of the characters. The Wife’s tea has, at one point, “gotten quite cold” and her feet also hurt “when it gets cold” (38; 17). The younger woman asks to let her brother come inside because “it’s cold outside” (41; 21). He soon tells a story of how, “whenever it got cold, [Father] had a pain in his hips” that caused him to yell and sometimes even hit his son in rage (43; 23). Near the end of the play, a fire marshal’s voice is heard from outside. He warns the family that “tonight is especially cold. Be careful [children] don’t freeze to death while they sleep. The city authorities are drawing special attention to that danger” (47; 28–29).

Both cold and snow function as reminders of winter, which is a recurring, cyclical state in both the time of Hans Christian Andersen, “contemporary” times (which was the 60s when this play was first performed), and today. Night and darkness also appear in the play in several instances, providing another example of recurring phenomena. The older man remembers that he lost his daughter and assumed she died on “a dark evening” (44; 25) and the brother accuses his father of buying matches from the little girl when she was a prostitute “every night...every night [...] night after night” (50; 32). The play also takes place over the course of a night. Near the beginning, the Wife tells her husband (the older man), that “we saw the sunset a little while ago” (28; 6). Later in the night, the fire marshal asks them, “you’re not going to stay up all night, are you?” (47; 28). The play ends with the aforementioned voice-over in which “the New Year’s morning sun” rises (51; 33). Thus, allusions to time in the play repeatedly take the form of references to cyclical, relative markers of time and their indicators. Never once in the play does any character ever mention time in terms of numbers (i.e. 1947), the only exception being the words “twenty years ago”—still a relative, rather than absolute, marker of time.

This sense of primal reality and relative and ahistorical time is further constructed through repeated references to elemental substances such as rain, fire, water, ice, and clouds (40; 19, 45–47; 26–29, 51; 33). Perhaps the most dramatic juxtaposition of cold, fire, water, and darkness in one monologue is the Wife’s description of one of the nights their daughter ran away:

A fire alarm sounded in the middle of the night, and when I looked, she wasn’t there. We ran out after her, frantic. The bridge over the river outside the village was down. The child, drenched to the skin, was being held in the arms of a volunteer fireman. A bonfire was burning...
(40; 19)

Elemental substances, times of day, weather, and the seasons all function to give a rich texture to the play. Vivid sensory descriptions and repeated references to memories and images strengthen this heightened atmosphere.¹⁶ All this contributes to a sense of transcendence over linear history and emphasis on those aspects of nature that are eternal and cyclical.

This is important because it suggests that *The Little Match Girl* does more than reflect conditions particular to the 60s. It also tells a story that is, in many ways, timeless. Furthermore, it suggests that sense of historical repetition was part of the 60s itself.

Cyclical Time on the Dramatic Stage: Nature as Cyclical Time (Part I: The King of La Mancha's Clothes)

In *The King of La Mancha's Clothes*, a sense of time based on nature and the elements takes precedence just as it does in *The Little Match Girl*. Once again, elemental indicators of time appear onstage in the opening moments of the play, in this case in the stage directions:

A quiet bedroom. Night. A thick curtain is pulled around the walls, blocking out the moonlight, which should flood the room. In the midst of the gloom, an old, stout-looking bed can be seen. (184; 4)

Once again, just like in *The Little Match Girl*, the mood is set not with indicators of historical time, but rather with sensory details and with indicators of primal and cyclical

¹⁶ “Heightened atmosphere” refers here to the effect created by a theatrical style and tone that constructs a world that does not follow the naturalistic laws of “reality”, but rather emphasizes certain emotions and symbols for an aesthetic purpose. Whereas Chekhov’s plays are naturalistic, a musical such as *Phantom of the Opera* has a heightened atmosphere which does not accurately resemble “real life” in the literal sense (i.e. people break randomly into song and dance and fire and mist abound). Instead, it seeks to “heighten” a specific very *real* feeling (i.e. wonder, fear, mystery, elegance, horror, ebullience, etc.) to the degree of unreality.

time: night, darkness, and the moon. Soon, the Emperor awakens and expounds on the subject of the night:

Somehow or other, I wish someone would take the responsibility for at least a portion of the night. At the most, what we have is quite enough. Night after night, we can hardly manage what we have to do, and I'm sick of the whole thing. And there are so many in this world who are troubled because the night is never long enough.... (185; 6)

Night and darkness thus take on almost a life of their own in the characters' imaginations. This echoes the characterization of the "infinite darkness" beneath the little girl's skirt as being "as profound as that of the depths of the sea", as described by the voice-over in *The Little Match Girl* (36; 15). This theme of infinite darkness appears again in the stage directions' description of the change between the first and second scene of *The King of La Mancha's Clothes*. These detail how, when the curtain opens, "behind them there is no wall, no window. Only a vast darkness, spreading everywhere" (185; 8). In both plays, therefore, darkness takes on an epic, mythic quality: "infinite", "spreading everywhere" or "as profound as that of the depths of the sea".

Additionally, the exact words "night after night" appear in the English translations of both plays. The Japanese versions of both plays do not use exactly the same word: *mai-yo mai-yo* in *The Little Match Girl* (36; 15) and *mai-ban mai-ban* in *The King of La Mancha's Clothes* (185; 6). These two words are not the same, yet they use parallel constructions of twice repeating *mai*, meaning "every", followed by a character that means night: either *yo* or *ban*. The discrepancy is thus almost negligible, as the two characters that differ, *yo* and *ban*, are virtually interchangeable in meaning (Jisho.org). This recurrence thus points to the theme of recurring nights appearing in both plays.

Another similarity between *The Little Match Girl* and *The King of La Mancha's Clothes* is that both take place over the course of a single night. *The King of La Mancha's Clothes* begins and ends in a bedroom. In the beginning, it is night in the bedroom, but in the end it is morning. "Lovely spring sunlight" can be seen "streaming through the trees" outside the window and the "Emperor is blinded by it" (229; 123). *The Little Match Girl* and *The King of La Mancha's Clothes* therefore both end with an explicit mention of the morning. The last line of *The King of La Mancha's Clothes*, is, in fact, a stage direction that dictates that the final image of the play be one of: "the sunlight continu[ing] to flood into the room" (232; 134).

In addition to times of day, *The King of La Mancha's Clothes* also makes reference to primal elements. As soon as the Fool and Emperor walk out onto the moor for the first time, "fierce" and powerful wind "attacks them without mercy" (186; 9). Soon, the action paints a picture of violent and primal elemental forces much like those referenced in *The Little Match Girl*. Fighting his way through the fierce wind, Emperor begins to quote King Lear:

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage! Blow!
 Your cataracts and huricanoes, spout
 Till you have drench'd our steeples, down'd the cocks!
 You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,
 Vaunt-courtiers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
 Singe my white head! [*King Lear*, Act III, Scene ii] (186; 9–10)

This primal invocation of fire, rain, and thunder echoes the imagery of fire, water, and darkness in the story about the runaway child in *The Little Match Girl*. Just as in that play, this and other references to the eternal behaviors of nature create an atmosphere of heightened reality that borders on mythic and nightmarish.

This primal and natural atmosphere reinforces the sense of cyclical time. Every night, the Emperor and the Fool dream almost the same dream, of wandering on the moor. The characters are quite aware of this cycle. One of the Emperor's first lines is: "we're having that dream *again!*" (184; 5).¹⁷ The Emperor soon attests very clearly to the habitual predictability of his nightly activities, saying: "when night comes, we always wander around here" (190; 20). In this way, allusions to time of day and seasons, elemental imagery, and even explicit references in both *The Little Match Girl* and *The King of La Mancha's Clothes* create an atmospheric tone of heightened reality and of cyclical time.

Cyclical Time on the Dramatic Stage: Fairy Tales as Cyclical Time

Another topic of importance in discussing the theme of time within these plays is the fact that, as previously mentioned, they both draw heavily from Hans Christian Andersen fairy tales: *The Little Match Girl* from the eponymous tale and *The King of La Mancha's Clothes* from *The Emperor's New Clothes*. The latter play, in fact, does not stop there, but also references *Don Quixote* and *King Lear*. Neither of these plays, however, is set exclusively in a fairy-tale past. Instead, each feature "contemporary" characters embodying certain characteristics of the fairy tales. The ex-schoolteacher is Don Quixote and the Emperor with No Clothes. The young woman is the Little Match Girl. And yet neither of them is precisely the character Hans Christian Andersen originally depicted. Rather, they are newly-envisioned versions of them. The plays'

¹⁷ Emphasis mine; the usage of the word "again" implies cyclicity.

stories, likewise, bear noticeable resemblances to the fairy tales, yet clearly reinvent and alter them with many notable divergences, enhancements, and additions.

Betsuyaku Minoru, author of *The Little Match Girl*, offers the most illuminating analysis of the dramatic impact of this strategy of overlaying fairy tales on modern stories:

What I like about fairy tales is, in a word, something that can be achieved through memory. Supposing you have read a fairy tale before, by juxtaposing the memory of reading that tale with the present day, one can discern rather clearly something like a time zone containing the vertical axis of the present day and perpendicular axis of the memory of when one read the fairy tale. If so, I think that when constructing an absurd space, it is useful to view the drama in terms of the relationship between the vertical axes of memory and the present day, rather than as a story which unfolds along a horizontal axis. So, it seems chiefly a matter of taking the memories that give form to the present day, the sediment from the past that forms the present, if you will, the vestiges of the past, and transposing them to the fairy tale so that they can be seen in another light. (Rolf 16)

What Betsuyaku describes is, therefore, certainly not linear time. Rather, he argues that the relationship between the fairy tale and the present day reality is like that of two axes, perpendicular to each other. This suggests the coexistence of two realities: the past and the present, combined together, visible at the same time. This coexistence of past and present also characterizes both plays; fairy tale characters from the distant and almost mythical past and everyday characters from the familiar present occupy the same dramatic space. In many cases, they are the same character, such as the Japanese ex-schoolteacher who is also a medieval European emperor.

A cyclical sense of time also blurs the line between past and present in similar ways. Therefore, the coexistence of fairy tale past and familiar present constitute another instance of time repeating itself. This implies that the plays, when referring to one time

period, may well be referring to many others. It also implies that, in any given time period, people may actually feel as if history is repeating.

Cyclical Time on the Historic Stage: Prostitution in the Occupation, the 50s, and the 60s

The sense of repetition within each play parallels a sense of historical repetition within the historical periods the plays were created. In the case of *The Little Match Girl*, the ways in which natural imagery and fairy tales create a sense of dreamlike repetition parallels a similar sense of dreamlike repetition in Japan in the occupation era, the 50s, and the 60s.

Many aspects of Japanese society changed drastically following the end of World War II, and thus popular understandings of this period often emphasize the complete demise of the wartime social order and the rise of a completely new postwar order. A new constitution was implemented. Women were given the right to vote. The military was largely abolished. Yet, the nation was not as completely changed as it might have appeared. Some aspects of Japanese society associated explicitly with the wartime order remained for years. Some even remain today. In 1945, the war may have been over, but in 1966, it was still not gone.

The legacy of the war loomed large in three areas of particular interest to *The Little Match Girl*: the emperor system, prostitution, and international competition. The most obvious continuity is that of the imperial system. Hirohito, the Shōwa Emperor, remained on the throne following Japan's defeat and continued to rule for another four decades.

Prostitution is an area of less-well-known continuity. The story of comfort women that was originally closely associated with the war was, however, repeated again after the wars' end. The Japanese military established the institution of comfort women during the war, recruiting primarily Korean women to provide sexual services to Japanese soldiers, as previously discussed in Chapter 1 (Lie 253; Soh 59). This institution, sadly, did not disappear with the end of the war, it simply changed. On 28 August 1945, the very day Allied soldiers began to land, the new Japanese comfort women began providing them with sexual services at state-sponsored brothels (Dower 127–29).

Were those who enacted these cruelly ironic measures deprived of a historical consciousness? History suggests quite the opposite. Ita Shinya,¹⁸ a police chief at the time of the establishment of the R.A.A. (Recreation and Amusement Association—the euphemism for Japanese brothels that served Allied soldiers), describes the situation thus: “Konoe [the Vice-Prime Minister] remembered what Japanese soldiers did to Chinese women in the Manchurian Incident, so he felt he should save Japanese women” (Lie 256). “Save” in this instance, refers to the idea that by using some women as a “shock absorber” (Lie 256–57), the rest of the country could be “saved”. Thus, in an effort to avoid repeating one aspect of history (indiscriminate military rape), the Japanese government repeated another aspect of history (organized state-sponsored prostitution).

The Japanese comfort women of 1945 were actually also repeating a history even older than that of the Second World War. The institution of Japanese comfort women was actually consistent with a “well-established policy in dealing with Western barbarians” (Dower 126). Nowhere is this more clear than in the deliberate comparison of comfort

¹⁸ Research leaves it unclear whether this name is “Shin’ya” or “Shi’nya”. “Shin’ya” is, however, the more likely of the two.

women to an earlier historical figure. A Japanese woman named Okichi was assigned as a consort for Townsend Harris, the first American consul to take up residence in Japan in 1856. Recruiters of 1945's Japanese comfort women "appropriated her sad, sensual image" and declared their recruits as *Shōwa no Tōjin Okichi*, the "Okichis of the present era" (Dower 126). These women, therefore, were consciously embodying history. Okichi lived again through them; the past coexisted with the present and history repeated itself.

The institutional legitimacy of these "Okichis of the present era" was, however, short lived. As early as January 1946, the Allied authorities began to condemn the R.A.A. brothels, proclaiming that prostitution was antithetical to democracy (Lie 257). It was not difficult to tell that this position was adopted mostly to save face, since Allied authorities, for all their noble words, continued to act in a way that expressed "informed passivity, if not outright complicity" with unofficial prostitution (Lie 258). The hypocrisy of authorities is clear in this testimony by a former Japanese police officer describing incidents in which prostitutes from R.A.A. brothels were "hunted down" and arrested:

It was terrible. Just as the expression "hunting" [*karigomi*] suggests, they [prostitutes] were all treated like animals, as if catching wild cats. Led by the MP's jeep, we went by trucks and pushed everyone into the trucks. However, many MP's, when they took off their uniform, became customers and bought street prostitutes. (Lie 258)

Following the forced closure of R.A.A. brothels, most of the 55,000 newly-unemployed comfort women immediately went to work in private brothels (Lie 258). Whole areas of cities such as Tokyo were designated as either "Red Line" (*akasen*) prostitution districts or "Blue Line" (*aosen*) prostitution districts. In addition, streetwalkers (*panpan*) proliferated. The sum total number of prostitutes in Japan only increased following the official ban. Many continued to serve American clientele (Lie 258). Several prostitutes

interviewed in 1948 had not even heard of MacArthur's prohibition on prostitution (Lie 259). Their stories bear witness to the fact that "the continuity between prewar and postwar periods, manifested itself most strikingly in the state policy towards prostitution" (Lie 256). Once again, time moved cyclically. The *Little Match Girl's* depiction of ahistorical time and prostitution, therefore, partially reflects a feeling during the postwar era that, in regards to prostitution, history was indeed repeating itself.

Cyclical Time on the Historic Stage: Global Conflict in the Occupation, the 50s, and the 60s

Nations vie for dominance in different ways in both war and sports. Japan fought its last war in 1945. At the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, however, images of war resurfaced in the sports arena. Writer Sugimoto Sonoko's musings on the opening ceremony of the games provide a perfect example of the sort of historical *déjà vu* that appeared during this time. While watching the formalities in the Olympic stadium, she was reminded of another event that took place twenty-one years earlier in exactly the same place. At that time, the stadium was called Jingū Stadium, a name that harked back to a historical, premodern Japanese Empress (once again, the past coexists with the present). On 21 October 1943, students from seventy-seven universities marched through the stadium at a farewell rally. They were about to be sent to the front. Worsening war conditions had forced the Japanese military to begin to draft its own university students (excepting only those studying the sciences). Sugimoto describes her sense of *déjà vu*:

Twenty years ago, also in October, I was at this same stadium. I was one of the female students. We stood there on the ground in the autumn rain to see the student soldiers off to the front. The scene inside the stadium has completely changed. Yet the size of the track is the same,

and I learned that its location is the same as twenty years ago. I could not stop the memories of that day, memories of the march of the mobilized students from returning to me.

Around the royal box where the emperor and crown prince sat [during the Olympics' opening ceremony], Prime Minister Tōjō Hideki had addressed the students, encouraging them to destroy the American and British enemies. (Igarashi 144)

In Sugimoto's mind "today's Olympics is connected to that day [in 1943], and that day is connected to today" and she is "fearful of this connection" (Igarashi 144). For her and others, the past was "superimposed" on the present in the same way as Betsuyaku describes the fairy tale being superimposed on the present within his play.

Memories of the war lived on both in the Tokyo Olympics themselves and in the preparation for them. Popular Japanese media, leading up to the games, began calling the Olympics a "sacred war" (*seisen*) in critical response to the "frenzied nationalistic tone" of the "Olympic fever" that preceded them (Igarashi 143). Some construction contractors preparing for the games went so far as to describe the enormity of their project with the word *gyokusai*, a wartime term literally meaning "shattered jewel" and well known as a euphemism for Japanese mass suicide in battle (Igarashi 143). The connection of war and Olympic preparations was echoed plainly by literary critic Etō Jun who "felt the Japanese were fighting a war" given the construction's furious pace (Igarashi 144). "Unless the majority of people tacitly recognized this as a kind of war," Etō explains, "the Japanese could never bear this thorough destruction of their living conditions." Tokyoites put up with the disruption Olympic preparations produced in their lives because they "must have instinctively known that this 'war' was worth the sacrifice" (Igarashi 144).

The success of the Japanese women's volleyball team is a notable anecdote in this regard. In 1964, coach Daimatsu Hirobumi lead the Japanese women's volleyball team to

world victory. Daimatsu was thus, understandably, a popular hero, but he was also controversial. Much of this related to the fact that his version of athletic training was the “postwar equivalent of wartime total mobilization” (Igarashi 159). One of his most infamous training strategies was to force the women on his team to keep playing without time off even when they were on their periods. He defended this strategy with the explanation that “as they keep practicing a year or two even with their periods, they will have bodies that can endure the same practice even with cramps” so that “whenever they face games, their period no longer hampers their performance” (Igarashi 157).

How did Daimatsu justify subjecting his players to such demanding and arguably inhumane conditions? He had himself fought in, suffered through, and survived World War II and he often made clear connections between war and volleyball. When his players flagged, he urged them on, telling them of his hardships during the war. He assured them that while they were suffering now, as long as they did not give up, they would one day end up victorious survivors, like him (Igarashi 161). Determined to push his player’s past their limits, Daimatsu hurled balls at them with all his strength like a “rapid-firing gun”, refusing to stop, even when they fell to the ground and did not move. His coaching style “re-presented battle scenes in the practice court, shouting at bodies that had been shot, blasted, which had fallen on the floor only to stand and fight again” (Igarashi 161). Daimatsu learned from his experiences in war that “winning is everything” (Igarashi 157). Thus, by re-conceptualizing volleyball as war, and then winning the world championship, he achieved victory not only for himself, but on behalf of his nation.

For Daimatsu, the wartime past and peacetime present had to coexist in order for him to achieve nationalistic triumph. Daimatsu was not alone. Official promotion for the Olympics also encouraged the conscious connection of past and present for a similar reason: to promote a narrative of recovery. Official promotions the Olympics (such as documentaries) showcased various “juxtaposition of 1945 and 1964” in order to encourage the public to “make a short circuit” from the destruction of the wartime to the reconstruction of the 60s (Igarashi 145). By leaving out “the historical process of the nineteen years between” the war and the Olympics, “the painful memories of defeat were paired with eventual reconstruction and thus rendered benign” (Igarashi 145). Through combining past and present and thereby promoting a narrative of recovery, the Olympics “assisted in masking” Japan’s “struggle to deal with the destruction” of the war and occupation (Igarashi 145).

The Little Match Girl, when seen in this context, utilizes the exact same strategy of melding the 60s and the occupation era, but for the opposite purpose: unmasking Japan’s struggle to deal with its recent destruction. Official narratives that appeared at the Olympics championed the image of a happy recovery from the unpleasant past. Betsuyaku, however, imposed a counter narrative: one where, once the past had been invited back in, it upset the equilibrium of the present and revealed that many of the old sins and sufferings remained unacknowledged and unresolved. This is precisely the situation the older couple in the play find themselves in when the younger woman appears at their door. Japan cannot, *The Little Match Girl* argues, simply “leave out” the postwar period and its suffering. Using war metaphors to win volleyball championships cannot erase the painful memories of real war. A simplistic narrative of recovery is

disingenuous because some Japanese (i.e. prostitutes and war orphans) have never been given the chance to truly recover. The older couple in the play would like to claim that they have left the past behind them and achieved stability, but their daughter, the still-scarred child prostitute whose family has rejected her, has unfinished business with them.

In order to show how the past invades the present, Betsuyaku evokes a sense of cyclical time and repetition. This repetition, however, was not original to Betsuyaku; it was present in the historical reality of the period in which he wrote *The Little Match Girl*.

Cyclical Time on the Historic Stage: Prostitution in the High-Growth Era and the 90s

In the case of *The King of La Mancha's Clothes*, the blending of past and present within the play reflect the blending of past and present in the popular culture and thought of the high-growth era. Prostitution is one area of historical continuity, repetition, and cyclicity during this period.

In the 90s, popular discourse held that comfort women were a thing of the past. Most Japanese considered the sexually deviant behavior of schoolgirls (*kogaru*) to be the most pressing, contemporary issue related to female sexuality. Some scholars, however, draw a connection between comfort women and *kogaru*. One connection is that, while the sexual exploitation of Korean comfort women happened in the 30s and 40s and the sexual exploits of *kogaru* happened in the 80s and 90s, popular media ended up discussing both at the same time. This was because, during the 90s, Korean comfort women survivors began to more vocally demand reparations, and the whole issue became a highly politicized scandal between Japan and Korea (Kinsella 52). The result was that, during

the 90s, news reports about sexually deviant high school girls shared the same airwaves as news reports about comfort women reparations.

These two topics not only occupied the same media space, they also shared clear historical parallels. In both cases, large numbers of young women were involved in sexual service. Both groups, moreover, desired monetary compensation (in the case of comfort women, it was after-the-fact legal reparations). The fact that both popular culture and political debate would be focused on such similar issues at the same time (the 90s and early 2000s) is remarkable. It is not a coincidence. The “cultural fantasy” of the sexy schoolgirl, Kinsella argues, was “stimulated at a subterranean level by the recently awakened memories of wartime comfort women”. The pop culture image of a “silent and mobile army of sexualized schoolgirl deviants” echoed a “distorted vision” of the “recently reawakened” memories of wartime comfort women (Kinsella 58). The fact that many comfort women were abducted into sexual servitude when they were of junior or senior high-school age strengthens the sense of historical repetition (Kinsella 58).

The 80s and 90s era parallels for comfort women do not end there. The relationship between comfort women and their clients has historically mirrored international power relationships between nations: Korean comfort women served their Japanese conquerors and Japanese comfort women served their American conquerors. In the high-growth era, Japan was neither conquering, nor being conquered, so would there still be more comfort women? Sadly, there were. Japan’s economic ascendancy produced a power relationship between Japan and its neighbors not entirely dissimilar to that of military dominance. For instance, in the 80s, the sex industry in Thailand (a nation Japan had invaded forty years earlier) began catering to Japanese tourists (as well as those from

other rich countries like England and Germany). Put simply: in the 40s, Japanese men travelled abroad and had sex with Korean comfort women, and in the 80s, Japanese men travelled abroad and had sex with Thai prostitutes (Petras and Wongchaisuwan 441). Tourists are not the same as soldiers and prostitutes are not the same as sex slaves, but the two stories are nevertheless strangely similar.

In the 90s, the Thai sex industry went international, and Thai prostitutes were sent to Japan. Of these, some were children who fed Japan's growing fascination with young girls' sexuality (Barr). Thai immigrants' status as non-Japanese, moreover, afforded them fewer legal protections. "It's mysterious," explained an executive at a Japanese child-pornography company in the late 90s, "it's OK to publish nude pictures of foreign girls, but not of Japanese girls" (Barr). Some Japanese publishers found a way to exploit this racist double-standard while capitalizing on the popularity of the Japanese schoolgirl image. Their method was to print pictures of Southeast Asian girls partially-dressed in Japanese school uniforms and re-christened with Japanese names. This way, publishers could satisfy the desires of those who lusted after Japanese schoolgirls while avoiding the legal protection afforded to ethnic Japanese.

This was not the first time foreign girls had been "Japanese-ified" as sexual objects for a Japanese male market. During the colonization of Korea in World War II, Japanese authorities forced Koreans (including comfort women) to change their names from Korean names to Japanese names (Soh 69). In this way, Japanese child pornography entrepreneurs in the 90s enacted and embodied the same history of comfort women recruiters in the 30s and the 40s.

Prostitution is a major theme in *The King of La Mancha's Clothes*. So is cyclical time. This parallels the cyclical nature of prostitution in recent Japanese history. History repeats itself decade after decade in the same way that the Emperor wanders around the moor night after night.

Cyclical Time on the Historic Stage: Global Conflict in the High-Growth Era and the 90s

Another historical event that is re-embodied in the high-growth era is that of international power struggle between Japan and the West (especially the United States). In this case, however, the battle was not fought by soldiers on the battlefield, but by businessman in the global marketplace. The following anecdote from the late 80s encapsulates this phenomenon.

In 1987, junior-high school students were polled about the possibility of Japan going to war in the future. Among those who thought it was possible, the nation they thought Japan was most likely to go to war with was the United States (Fields 20). This came as a surprise to older generations familiar with the close diplomatic ties between the two nations. The reason these youth regarded one of Japan's closest allies as a potential enemy was, however, simple: they were echoing the sort of "battle" rhetoric used in the media to describe trade friction between the two nations (Fields 20). This is indicative of a broader trend: during the high-growth era, the global economy became the primary battleground on which Japan could strive for global ascendancy.

Aida Hiroshi directed a series of six special programs entitled "Portrait of Japan as the Electronic Nation" that aired on NHK (Japanese national television) in 1991. High ratings indicated that the Japanese populace approved of the idea of themselves as an

“electronic nation” and a second follow-up series was produced in 1995–96. Part of Aida’s own explanation for his series’ popularity accounted for it in terms of nationalism and global struggle:

We used to think that we lost the war because of our inferior economy and because we lacked technological capabilities. Therefore, we will win this time by developing our economic and technological capabilities. I think the current Japanese prosperity came out of such thinking. (Yoshimi 150)

Aida deftly links economics with technology. He defines both as battle fronts on which the Japanese nation fights. According to him, this is a major reason why, during the high-growth era, both Japanese technology and the Japanese economy outpaced that of most other nations.

The global discourse around the Japanese tech industry from the 80s on has two major sides: Japanese techno-nationalism and the Western techno-orientalism (Yoshimi 151). As Japan’s economy and technology improved, techno-nationalism claimed that this superiority was a result of the inherent national and cultural identity of the Japanese. As Japan’s economy and technology continued to improve, however, techno-orientalism began to paint images of “Japan as a robot” and also subtly claimed that this was a result of Japan’s inherent national and cultural identity. Thus, both theories agreed on the fallacy of Japanese cultural essentialism; however, one sought to show it in a positive light and the other in a negative one.

Japanese techno-nationalism discourse had a habit of repeating and embodying history by drawing on the symbolism of a premodern past in order to encourage present-day consumption. This trend began as far back as the 50s when three electronic appliances (the washing machine, refrigerator and black and white TV) were designated

as the “three sacred treasures” (*Sanshu no Jingi*) (Yoshimi 155). The original, premodern, “three sacred treasures” are the mirror, sword, and jewel—symbols of the Imperial Family. George Macklin Wilson refers to these mythical items as symbolizing Japan’s spirit as it “moved through time even while it ‘existed’ as time—without conceivable end” (569). The three sacred treasures also seemed to move through time without conceivable end, for in the 60s, a new set had appeared: the car, air-conditioner, and color TV (Yoshimi 155). Add to this that a series of earlier economic booms were named after mythical Japanese emperors Jimmu and Izanagi, presenting another example of the consumerist present re-embodying the mythical past (Yoshimi 155). Thus, the advancing discourse of techno-nationalism also relied on a sense of cyclical time: Japan’s mythological past was glorious and so will be its technological future.

As Japanese techno-nationalism advanced, so did Western techno-orientalism. Reports from Europe and the United States began to describe a growing “Japan problem” and correspondingly, Japan bashing (rhetoric and actions that unfairly insult Japan) proliferated (Yoshimi 151). The most notorious example of Japan bashing was when, in 1982, white American Ronald Ebens quite literally bashed Asian-American Vincent Chin’s head in with a baseball bat, killing him. Ebens and his friends were out-of-work auto workers who blamed Japan’s success in the automobile industry for their personal predicament. A fight began outside of a Detroit strip club. Ebens assumed Chin was Japanese and thus vented his anger on him. It is a cruel bit of irony and ignorance that Chin was in fact Chinese-American. Nevertheless, the racist intention was clear and the event has acted as a rallying cry for Asian-American advocacy and activism ever since (Yip).

Another less dramatic (but no less literal) example of Japan bashing occurred when an 80s American TV advertisement showed US congressmen bashing Toshiba-brand products with sledgehammers in what was “virtually an American political commercial for local consumption” (Fields 75). The advertisement may have been in poor taste even by American standards, but in the U.S., advertisements that assert the inferiority of a competitor’s product are commonplace. This is not so in Japan. Therefore, while the murder of Vincent Chin most shocked Asian-Americans, the smashing of Toshiba products made a stir primarily among island Japanese (Fields 75). This was because the Japanese populace saw the smashing of Toshiba products as violence “extending to all Japanese products” (Fields 76). Further, since Japanese technology was a symbol of Japanese identity, violence against Japanese products was misconstrued as an act of war. The reaction of the offended Japanese public was comparable, in some ways, to that of “an American seeing the Stars and Stripes burned in the streets of Teheran” (Fields 76). One Japanese commentator felt that “the scenes brought back memories of war years when children were shown sticking bamboo spears into the national flags of the Allies” (Fields 76).

All this speaks to the extent to which the charged international atmosphere relived the legacy of war through economics. War metaphors described business on both sides of the Pacific. Theodore White, in an editorial for the *New York Times*, said that “Japan was doing to the United States what it failed to accomplish in Pearl Harbor, but this time Japan was sending over VCRs and cars instead of bombs” (Fields 77).

The images of foreigners in Japanese advertising during the high-growth era attest to the nuances of this new, economic version of international “war”. A major shift in the

portrayal of foreigners in Japanese domestic advertising occurred during the high-growth era. For a long time, Japanese images of foreigners usually evoked discomfort and fear; however, this changed with economic growth. In the 70s, Japanese advertisements began to portray foreigners as being more like E.T. and the Elephant Man: beings who “confront us with the fear of the out-of-the-ordinary and yet tell us that the fear is misplaced and that the ‘ugly’ unknowns are extremely lovable, like household pets” (Fields 31). Foreigners began being portrayed as friendly and tame “Others”, like E.T., and in this way, they reinforced a symbolic power structure in which Japan was dominant (Fields 32).

The trend can still be seen today, in commercials such as a recent series advertising Suntory’s BOSS Coffee featuring American actor Tommy Lee Jones as a character literally called “Alien Jones” (*Uchūjin Jōnzu*). These commercials usually feature Jones in a subordinate role such as taxi driver, apartment superintendent, or convenience store employee. As an alien, however, he uses his superhuman powers to surreptitiously help out his human friends and superiors by changing wasps into butterflies, correcting the orientation of shelved coffee so that it faces out, and using coffee to spontaneously cause widespread happiness throughout the city (“Santorii BOSS ‘Uchūjin Jōnzu Keiji’ Hen”, “Ii na CM Santorii BOSS Uchūjin Jōnzu Shirīzu vol. 3”).

Jones’ character is consistently shown as serving and assisting Japanese “superiors” with his charming demeanor and strange alien powers. He is the perfect example of what Fields describes as foreigners playing the “court jester” to the Japanese king (32). This trope within advertising provides further evidence that the power struggle

between Japan and the West (especially the U.S.) was not over. The struggle on the military battlefield in the 40s was now embodied on the economic battlefield in the 90s.

Another dimension of nationalism during the high-growth era and beyond was nationalistic education. Conservative political authorities prescribed patriotism and a return to traditional values as antidotes to the growing crisis of disillusioned, disobedient, and delinquent students. Thus, in an effort to encourage “moral education”, textbooks were censored to de-emphasize the atrocities committed by Japan during the war (Schoolland 170). While some might (and did) argue that avoiding responsibility for war crimes is actually antithetical to real morality, authorities successfully equated a sense of traditional morals with a sense of traditional national pride. They considered descriptions of Japan’s actions in China and Korea that used words like “aggression” and “massacre” to be damaging to national pride, and public school textbooks were thus correspondingly censored. This, naturally, sparked outrage in many Chinese and Koreans (Schoolland 170–71). It is a popular maxim that those who do not know history are doomed to repeat it. By effacing memories of the negative consequences of Japanese nationalism in the past, policymakers allowed, in fact hoped, that Japanese nationalism would see a resurgence in the future.

Nationalism in education saw a revival in other ways besides censorship. History classes were ordered to study eighth-century writings that extolled the legendary Emperor Jinmu (Schoolland 173). In 1989, the Ministry of Education instructed schools to raise the rising-sun flag (*Hinomaru*) and play the Emperor’s song (*Kimigayo*) at school ceremonies. Ishibashi Kazuya, Minister of Education, defended this, saying that “in this period of internalization, we [the Japanese] will be jeered [at] by other countries unless

we resolutely develop our national identity” (Schoolland 174). This flag and song were, however, not the official flag or anthem of the nation until 1999 (Consulate-General of Japan in San Francisco). Rather, they were both closely associated with the Emperor system. Conservative policymakers employed them, however, in order to promote a sense of “national identity” that stretched back into the distant past through its attachment to the ancient, unchanging, imperial family (Schoolland 174). The Emperor is, thus, once again, a focal point of nationalism and historic continuity. Education, also, appears as a battleground for the reclamation of national identity and the continuity of a repetitive international power struggle.

The King of La Mancha’s Clothes is a play about the havoc a materialistic ideology rooted in economics can wreak when applied to the education system. It is also a play where history and time repeat themselves. In both of these respects, it reflects its historical period. Nationalism experienced a resurgence, manifest in both economics and education. In this way, education and economics both manifested cyclicity. Cyclicity is important because it indicates that plays like these two, which arise from a reflection and commentary on one historical period, also have great relevance to other time periods as well, as history is continuously repeating itself.

Cyclicity Between Plays and Eras: Introduction

So far, I have argued that both *The Little Match Girl* and *The King of La Mancha’s Clothes* manifest cyclical time. This is done primarily through referencing repetitive natural phenomena (i.e. weather, seasons, times of day, etc.) and through superimposing a fairy tale from the mythic past on a story from the realistic present. I

have continued to argue that this trend towards cyclical time on the dramatic stage parallels a similar sense of historical repetition on the cultural, political, social, and international stage. Prostitution and issues related to comfort women consistently reappeared in new and just-as-prevalent forms in the time periods when both plays were produced. The legacies of war, global struggle, and nationalism also repeated themselves time and time again and again in both periods.

Having established that there is a sense of repetition and cyclicity *within* both plays and both time periods, I shall now argue that there is a large-scale sense of repetition and cyclicity *across* both plays and time periods. In other words, *The Little Match Girl* and *The King of La Mancha's Clothes* and their respective time periods do not only imply repetition, *The King of La Mancha's Clothes* actually repeats *The Little Match Girl* and the 90s actually repeat the 60s.

Cyclicity Between Plays and Eras: Yami, the darkness

Both *The Little Match Girl* and *The King of La Mancha's Clothes* make repeated references to darkness. I have mentioned some of these already; however, I will refer to them again for the purpose of highlighting the connections between one play and the other. The *kanji* (Chinese character) *yami*, meaning “darkness” or “night” is of particular importance. *Yami* in Japanese can stand for both literal and metaphorical darkness (much like comparable words in English). It can indicate the absence of light, but also the absence of moral values (Weblio.jp). Both plays make use of the word *yami* to varying degrees; however, the theme of both literal and metaphorical darkness is even more present than the word that describes it. In both cases, the darkness stems not from one

person or one group, but from the whole atmosphere of the age. The fact that both plays reference such a similar “dark age” provides evidence that they are, in this respect, repeating each other.

Each play makes use of the motif of darkness in order to paint a mythic picture of a sort of societal “dark age”. The “dark age” in both plays is characterized most distinctly by two factors: the dominance of the black market and the prevalence of prostitution. The clearest historical parallel for both of these occurrences is occupation-era Japan. It is peculiar that both *The Little Match Girl* (premiered in the 60s) and *The King of La Mancha’s Clothes* (premiered in the 90s) make such clear references to so similar a “dark age” (which actually historically occurred in the 40s). The reason for this dramatic repetition between both plays is, I argue, because it parallels a historic repetition. The plays indicate that the moral darkness and traumatic memories of the 40s did not end in that decade, but repeated, cyclically, in new forms, throughout the 60s and even the 90s. This fits with the narrative of historic repetition discussed earlier in this chapter.

In *The Little Match Girl*, the “dark age” is described primarily through voice-overs that use dramatic language to create a heightened atmosphere. The following monologue presents an example of the ways in which Betsuyaku paints a grotesque, yet magical image of an age characterized by darkness. The word *yami* and *kurayami* (a word derived from *yami* that also means darkness), is used no fewer than six times in the full monologue (partially quoted here):

People were starving then. Every night was dark and gloomy. The town was built on swampland, sprawling and stinking. Here and there shops had been set up, like sores that had burst open. Small animals were killed in the shadows, and secretly eaten. People walked furtively, like forgotten criminals, and now and then, unexpectedly, something would scurry by in the darkness. (36; 15)

Betsuyaku’s vivid language and careful description evoke an almost-mythical sense of a world rife with both literal and moral darkness. The source of the darkness is repeatedly subtly attributed simply to the age. The description does not lay blame for the state of the town on any natural disaster, oppressive overlord, or supernatural curse. Rather, it simply states that “people were starving then”—then, in that ahistorical unit of time, that is simply what occurred. It was a function of the age.

One characteristic feature of this “dark age” is the black market. Firstly, the linguistically parallels between the darkness of the age and the market are clear, since *yami* is also the “black” in the Japanese word for “black market” (*yami-ichi*). The location where a black market takes place is a *yami-shijō*, a black market price is a *yami-ne* or *yami-sōba*, a merchant on the black market is a *yami-ya* or a *yami-shōnin*, and a black-market lender is a *yami kin'yu gyōsha* (Jisho.org; Kotobank; Sanseido Web Dictionary).

Betsuyaku’s description of shops that were like “sores that had burst open” also aptly describes the sickeningly amoral nature of the black markets. Many who lived through the time described the markets as “junge-like” and “predatory” (Dower 144). Furusawa Kōtarō, a black market profiteer who later became a journalist, recounted how he spent over six months mercilessly squeezing every penny out of every customer, no matter if they were women, children, or desperately poor. He would call precious kimonos moth-eaten rags in order to get a better price. At one point, a relative of his whose house had been bombed and who had a sick mother at home came pleading to him, but he refused to show her even the smallest trace of generosity.

The cold, hard, everyday reality of the black market remained unaffected by the actions of distant political echelons. Furusawa describes how “the emperor’s renunciation of divinity, and the liberal, democratizing policies issued by the occupation forces all seemed irrelevant to the dark faces gathered in the black market” (Dower 144).

Betsuyaku’s description of small animals killed in the shadows accurately represent the brutal atmosphere. The corruption was so complete that it reached all the way up through the police. When one man in Osaka found his recently-stolen coat on sale at the black market and appealed to the police for help, the best they could do was negotiate down the price down for him. He was allowed to buy it back from its thieves for 500 yen. His base salary as a city employee at the time was 700 yen per month (Dower 144). Such was the extent to which profit was divorced from obedience to the laws of both government and ethics during this era.

The older man and woman in *The Little Match Girl* refer to market brutality of the “dark ages” referenced in that play in no uncertain terms. When the younger woman reveals she is ashamed of what she did during this time, they counter:

Wasn’t it because you were poor? I don’t mean to be rude, but...
[...] You shouldn’t be ashamed of that. Everyone did those things then.
Those who didn’t, didn’t survive. Children stole things. After I had
worked so hard to make hotcakes [pancakes] for his birthday, they stole
them. It was like that then [...] I had to do such things, too. Just as you did,
I tried to sell things as a peddler. It’s nothing to be ashamed of. Really.
(37; 16)

The dark and vicious nature of black market behavior is chalked up to the fact that it was “it was like that then” and a profiteer is euphemistically repainted as a “peddler”. Once again, the focus is on the times, not with the individuals involved. The fact that children growing up during these times engaged in illegal acts is taken as proof that the fault lies

simply with the age. There is no shame, the two argue, in going with the times. Those who did not, they affirm, did not survive. There is evidence to support their claim.

Yamaguchi Yoshitada was a judge in the Tokyo district court who refused to buy food on the black market, writing in his diary that “even bad laws are the law, and I am pledged to defend the law.” As consequence of his uncompromising refusal to dabble in darkness, he died of starvation in 1947 (Johnson 185).

“We couldn’t have survived” is also what the innkeeper’s wife in *The King of La Mancha’s Clothes* describes would have happened to her idealistic husband without her pragmatic help. Just like the older couple in *The Little Match Girl*, she advocates clearly: if you want to survive, “you learn to move with the times, and for your own profit” (191; 23). Her constant complaints about the Player’s children stealing her specially-made bread are remarkably similar to the story of the older woman in *The Little Match Girl* whose specially-made pancakes were also stolen by children. The older couple in *The Little Match Girl* immediately use poverty as an excuse for past immoral behavior (“Wasn’t it because you were poor?” [37;16]). In much the same way, the Wife in *The King of La Mancha’s Clothes* ridicules her husband’s kindness as financially impractical, telling him: “if you just go on stumbling along in that amiable way of yours, our business will just dry up” (211; 74). In this way, the older couple in *The Little Match Girl* and the Wife in *The King of La Mancha’s Clothes* offer strikingly similar life philosophies: when the world enters a “dark age” of cut-throat materialistic profiteering, if you want to live through it, you join in.

This parallels a number of behaviors from different historical periods. It parallels the attitude of 40s black market profiteers who mercilessly squeezed every penny out of

poor starving families. It also parallels the attitude of 80s school bullies who saw teacher's hypocritical and authoritarian behavior and learned to imitate it. It even parallels the attitude of 90s schoolgirls who learn that the world is about accumulating wealth and that, since women are faced with a glass ceiling that prevents them capitalizing on their talents, they should instead learn to capitalize on their bodies. This same logic of learning to "move with the times" also justifies forgetting one's past crimes. Blame is assigned to "the times" and thus externalized. This behavior fits with the 60s and the popular desire to move past memories of the war, focusing on the present, rather than acknowledging the sufferings of the past and those who still may have not recovered (i.e. war orphans, comfort women, etc.).

While *The Little Match Girl* is the play that most clearly features a black market, the characters in *The King of La Mancha's Clothes* also explicitly refer to their world having a black market on multiple occasions (196; 34, 217; 89). In both the play and the history, children best exemplify the spirit of "the times" through their engagement in this black market. In *The King of La Mancha's Clothes*, it is the children who have the fewest qualms about buying and selling goods (like stolen bread) on this black market. In the occupation as well, children sometimes saw the world through equally as materialistically pragmatic a view. One boy, for example, wrote a letter to the *Asahi* newspaper praising his older brother, who was able to support his mother and four siblings through black market activities. The boy argued that his brother's industrious and realistic business strategy was far more productive and praiseworthy than the high ideals of labor union workers, who were on strike and thus produced nothing. When he graduated from middle

school, the boy proudly announced that he intended to follow in his brother's footsteps (Dower 147).

The flip side of the triumph of economically pragmatic materialism is the denigration of heroism, morality, spirituality, and any other form of idealism that challenges the materialist paradigm. These are all ridiculed by characters in *The King of La Mancha's Clothes* as being purely imaginary and without substance, just like the Emperor's new clothes. This clearly parallels the 40s. Postwar writer Sakaguchi Ango, who exemplified a spirit of decadence and nihilism that was popular at the time, made a similar critique:

Could we not say that the kamikaze hero was a mere illusion, and that human history begins from the point where he takes to black-marketeering? That the widow as devoted apostle is mere illusion, and that human history begins from the moment when the image of a new face enters breast? And perhaps the emperor too is no more than an illusion, and the emperor's true history begins from the point where he becomes an ordinary human. (Dower 156)

Sakaguchi's insistence that only the carnal, corporeal, hedonistic aspects of life constitute "real" human experience is essentially the same as that presented by the characters in *The King of La Mancha's Clothes* who say, "Let's only talk about real things" (198; 39).

Thus, both *The King of La Mancha's Clothes* and the historical record of the US occupation of Japan portray an age characterized by metaphorical *yami*: the darkness of immorality, materialism, and social breakdown.

Yami is also used in the word "woman of dark" (*yami no onna*), a euphemism for prostitute. This is fitting, since prostitution is the second defining characteristic of the "dark age" described in both plays and in historical accounts of the occupation era. As previously discussed, prostitution during the postwar era was on the rise. After the

dissolution of the R.A.A., prostitution continued to exist in diverse forms with names such as: *panpan*, “Butterfly” and “Only” (Dower 132). In *The Little Match Girl*, the young woman recounts memories of being a child prostitute during the time of “starving”—the “dark age” of black-markets and prostitution. In *The King of La Mancha’s Clothes*, the Girl is also an underage prostitute.

Both girls’ fathers, moreover, are implicated in their daughter becoming a prostitute, forming an even more striking connection. In *The Little Match Girl*, the girl strongly suspects her father of being the one who taught her to lift her skirt while matches were burning (38; 17). He denies everything; however, the evidence mounts against him when the girl’s younger brother firmly recalls that “father bought matches” (50; 32). In *The King of La Mancha’s Clothes*, the Player threatens his misbehaving daughter in a moment of anger, saying “sell you [to a brothel], why I might just go ahead and do it” (200; 45). He does not fulfill his threat; however, because of it, his daughter does end up prostituting herself by her own volition.

Both plays, thus, reference a “dark age” of black-markets and prostitution that is so grievous that children become thieves and fathers sell their own daughters as prostitutes. In every case, it is blamed on “the times”. Conflict in both plays erupts between those who easily and gladly adapt to the standards of the times, and those who are intent to holding to a more unwavering moral standard. In *The Little Match Girl*, the older couple adapts to the times, doing what is necessary to survive during the “dark age” and forgetting about it as soon as their fortunes take a turn for the better. The younger woman, however, clings to an absolute standard, and is thus unable to forget her past or forgive herself for it. In *The King of La Mancha’s Clothes*, the innkeeper’s wife, the

children, and, in some cases, the Fool all advocate for adaptation and flexibility. The Servant, the Innkeeper (for most of the play) and the Emperor (in most cases) advocate instead for a standard of uncompromising morality. Thus, in both plays, conflict ensues around how one should react to “the times”. This constitutes another similarity between plays and evidence that the two plays repeat each other.

Cyclicalities Between Plays and Eras: Conclusion

A central question of human behavior presented in both plays is whether or not to conform to the standards of one’s time when those standards contradict one’s standards of morality or objectivity. Is it better to remember one’s traumatic past or to deny it? Is it better to end up a naked fool or a well-clothed, hard-hearted, materialistic profiteer? Considering that both plays are written in different decades (the 60s and the 90s), it would be reasonable if the “standards of the age” in each play were presented differently. In fact, however, they are remarkably similar and they both hark back to an even earlier time (the 40s). *The Little Match Girl* refers to a “dark age” that occurred twenty years ago, yet the influence of which is still very much present. This is historically appropriate, since it places the beginning of the “dark age” in 1946, during the occupation (assuming the action in *The Little Match Girl* takes place the year the play was produced, 1966). *The King of La Mancha’s Clothes* refers to a very similar “dark age” that began ten years ago and has only worsened since. This is more historically perplexing, because that places the beginning of the dark age in 1981 (again assuming the play is set in the year it was written).

There is no historical record of any sort of occupation-esque “dark age” in 1981, but it is, however, the middle of the high-growth era. What the plays indicate, therefore, is that there is some similarity between the high-growth era and the occupation. This is fitting with the theme of the cyclicity and historical repetition: the high-growth era is, to some degree, repeating the 60s and the 40s. Time is in flux in both plays, jumping between pre-modern fairy tales and contemporary experience or constantly in loop through the repetition of “timeless” natural processes like seasons and sunrise or sunset. This is because the plays are indicating, at some level, that historical time is also in flux. The war is over, but the international power struggle continues. Comfort women are a thing of the past, but the sexualization and exploitation of young girls continues. In the same way that, every year, the sun rises and sets and the seasons come and go, emperors, prostitutes, and children continue to pose controversial issues.

In the first two chapters, I demonstrated how the plays connect with their specific time periods. The issue of time is, however, more complex and problematic than this. The plays also allude to cyclical time, both giving their stories a timeless quality and reflecting a sense of historical repetition during their time period. Moreover, viewed together, the plays repeat each other, thus providing further evidence of cyclicity. If history repeats itself, then a play that closely reflects the Emperors, prostitutes, and children of one historical period will also be able to closely reflect the Emperors, prostitutes, and children of another.

CONCLUSION: THE LOCAL IS UNIVERSAL

“To Betsuyaku[,] the more locally based a
play was, the more likely it was to attain
universality”
- Powell, *Japan’s Modern Theatre*, p. 180

Betsuyaku Minoru collaborated in founding the “Free Stage” (*Jiyū Butai*) theatre company shortly after his graduation from Tokyo’s renowned Waseda University. Both this company and its successor, “Waseda Little Theatre” (*Waseda Shōgekijō*), were led by a playwright and a director. Betsuyaku was the playwright. The director was a man named Suzuki Tadashi. Since the time of his collaboration with Betsuyaku, Suzuki has become an international theatre presence. To date, he has toured his productions to over thirty countries, taught his system of actor training at Juilliard School and the Moscow Art Theatre, written multiple books on acting that have been translated into English and published in the US, and even had his writings included in the Cambridge University Press series “Directors in Perspective” alongside theatre giants such as Meyerhold and Brecht. He also directed the first-ever production of *The Little Match Girl* (“Tadashi Suzuki Biography”). Despite his extensive collaboration with Betsuyaku, Suzuki’s international fame began largely after the two took their separate ways. They were both groundbreaking artists who produced fruitful collaborations, yet their philosophies on theatre differed to the degree that Suzuki felt “progressively less comfortable” the longer their partnership continued (Powell 180).

Betsuyaku later summarized their differences as stemming from “opposite conceptions of what was universal” (Powell 18). Suzuki, a director, maintained that

movement and the body were universal. Betsuyaku, however, was a playwright for whom “every word counted”, and he had an alternate answer to the question of universality (Powell 180). Rather than centering the actor’s body, Betsuyaku created theatre with the goal of expressing the “hushed murmurings of members of small communities.” His logic was that “the more locally based a play was, the more likely it was to attain universality” (Powell 180).

If one were to compare Betsuyaku’s success on the world stage to Suzuki’s, one might initially conclude that Suzuki was right about universality and Betsuyaku was wrong about it. Suzuki, after all is known internationally, and Betsuyaku rarely mentioned and almost never performed outside Japan. The reasons for this, upon closer examination, however, may have more to do with networking and institution-building than philosophy. Suzuki created Japan’s first international theatre festival. His privileged focus on the body allowed for easy multilingual collaborations between Japanese actors and foreign actors. He has created and continues to teach a physical acting method, leads a theatre company, and has transformed the remote village of Toga into a theatrical training center (“Tadashi Suzuki Biography”). Betsuyaku, on the other hand, has created no international festivals, leads no theatre company, has transformed no villages, and is at the mercy of translators if he wishes his texts to be appreciated by non-Japanese-speakers. His work is, therefore, not well-known outside of Japan.

Suzuki’s greater international success does not, therefore, necessarily indicate that his philosophy on universality is more “correct” than Betsuyaku’s, simply that he has had more success putting it into practice. While Betsuyaku’s plays were painstakingly translated, Suzuki was training and impressing cohort after cohort of Western actors in

his physical technique. He was able to quickly capitalize on the universality of the human body. This does not mean, however, that the “hushed murmurings of small communities” are not also universal, albeit in a different way.

It is my argument that, despite Betsuyaku’s comparatively small presence outside Japan, the playwright’s philosophy of universality may be as equally valid as Suzuki’s. Both men have enjoyed significant success within Japan. Both are well-acknowledged in the Japanese theatre world as visionary trailblazers who will continue to inspire generations to come. Suzuki’s acclaim in the West, moreover, provides encouraging evidence of the potential of modern Japanese theatre to evoke the universal and make an impact that crosses cultural and linguistic boundaries. Is there any reason why the work of Betsuyaku, Yokouchi, and others cannot do the same?

In this conclusion, I will both summarize the information I have presented in previous chapters and argue for the universal potential of these two plays. I have demonstrated that both plays hold up a “mirror” to the “nature” or “spirit” of some of the deepest and darkest recesses of the times in which they were created. Moreover, I have demonstrated that they manifest cyclical time. If events repeat in cycles, those who hold up a “mirror” to one time may also find another reflected in it. In the final point of this conclusion, I will argue that the plays’ deep and compelling reflection of their specific times in Japanese history gives them potential to provide deep and compelling reflections of other times and other cultures as well. For those of us in the West or in other nations besides Japan, this potential could best be realized through production of these plays in our own countries, potentially by our own artists.

A Summary of Previous Chapters

In the introduction to this thesis, I placed *The Little Match Girl* and *The King of La Mancha's Clothes* within the broader context of modern Japanese theatre, a theatre that is often relatively unfamiliar to most Western artists, academics, and Japan enthusiasts for complex historical reasons. The limited but illuminating scholarship that is available, however, clearly demonstrates that it is a rich and complex genre. Modern Japanese theatre artists carry forward the task first shouldered by their predecessors in the wartime and pre-war periods: to find innovative, honest, and engaging methods by which to hold up a mirror in which Japanese society can see itself. The two award-winning plays discussed here, moreover, provide noteworthy examples of two such mirrors. They are from different periods; however, they highlight similar social issues centering on patriarchal authority, prostitution, and inter-generational conflict.

In the first chapter, I discussed *The Little Match Girl* and the ways in which it reflects the reality of the occupation era, the 50s, and the 60s. The play juxtaposes the cultural nationalism of those who wish to forget the suffering of the war and occupation periods with the still-lingering ghosts of those who, like war orphans and prostitutes, are still suffering. The play thereby suggests that a narrative of complete recovery is disingenuous, and that Japan must face its ghosts in order to find peace with them.

In the second chapter, I discussed *The King of La Mancha's Clothes* and the ways in which it reflects the reality of the high-growth era and the 90s. The play employs a discussion of clothing and nakedness to critique the effect widespread materialistic ideology has had on the education system and its participants. It invokes both a Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale and *Don Quixote* in order to paint a picture of the time

period and encourage Japanese to take responsibility for the oppression of women and children and to move beyond consumerism and materialism.

In the third chapter, I argued for the importance of the theme of cyclical time in connecting these plays. Both plays manifest signs of cyclical time, thus placing their stories in an ahistorical atmosphere that gives them relevance in a broader range of time periods. Additionally, they reflect how, within one time period, a sense that history is repeating itself often exists. Moreover, when viewed together, the plays repeat each other and indicate that the histories are doing the same. The fact that certain historical issues therefore recur in cycles means that as these plays deeply reflect not only their own time period but all the others through which similar cycles occur.

An Argument for the Universal Potential of These Plays

According to Betsuyaku, “the more locally based a play was, the more likely it was to attain universality” (Powell 180). In the previous chapters, I have demonstrated that these plays are “locally based” within one time period, yet have the necessary “universality” to apply to others. This is, however, not the whole story. Although they are “locally based” within one culture, they have the potential to attain “universality” to apply to others. The plays thus have relevance across both time and place.

The Little Match Girl first premiered over fifty years ago, and *The King of La Mancha's Clothes* over twenty years ago. Neither play, however, has faded away with its decade. *The Little Match Girl* is the more well-known of the two plays, and no fewer than nine different Japanese theatre companies have staged productions of it since 2010. The majority of these were in Tokyo, although, productions also appeared in Fukuoka, Fukui,

and Toyama (“Macchi uri no shōjo”). The most recent was in Tokyo in April 2016 (“Macchi uri no shōjo”). *The King of La Mancha’s Clothes* is less iconic, and therefore less popular, but it has nevertheless been produced at least five times since the year 2000. Three Tokyo-based theatre companies, one Osaka-based company, and one Niigata-based company have mounted productions.¹⁹ The Niigata production is most recent, opening in March 2015 (Arai). It is therefore clear that the plays have made a lasting impression on Japanese producers and audiences who still feel their relevancy decades after the time whose “spirit” they originally reflected has ended.

One reason for this is that issues of patriarchal (and imperial) authority, prostitution, and inter-generational conflict continue to play significant roles in Japanese society today. A quick glance at news headlines and pop culture provides some indication of the ongoing relevance of these issues. For example, Emperor Akihito’s recent hints that he would like to resign have raised questions about whether such a policy change could end up opening the “Pandora’s box” of Imperial Household Law. This could lead to a renewed focus on potentially-controversial laws, such as those preventing women from taking the throne (Jones). The still highly-charged political and patriarchal nature of the Imperial system continues, thus, to be a national issue. Another dimension of patriarchal authority comes into focus in headlines that state that Japan has slid to 111th in global gender equality ranking in 2016. This ranking, issued by the World Economic Forum, ranks nations by gender equality in areas such as the workplace and education.

¹⁹ There are a variety of web sources that advertise different performances of this play: Arai, “‘Gusha ni wa mienai Ra Mancha no ōsama no hadaka’ no engeki kansō bun/gekihyō”, “Gusha ni wa mienai Ra Mancha no ōsama no hadaka”, “Chapter x Chapter: gusha ni wa mienai Ra Mancha no ōsama no hadaka”, “Dai 67 kai gekidan shishi-za kōen”.

Japan's ranking in 2016 shows negative progress from the year before, where it was ranked as 106th (Mie and Thomas).

Prostitution and the sexual objectification of young girls is also still a highly relevant issue. In a report issued 3 March 2016, the UN expressed “particular concern” over the *joshi-kōsei* (or “JK”) businesses that offer patrons compensated dates with high-school girls (the same business that saw its rise during the high-growth era). The report described the business as “not infrequent among some junior and senior high-school-age girls” who, after joining, often find themselves “coerced” into providing sexual services (UN Human Rights Council 4). The report acknowledges that Japan has made “considerable progress” since 2001, but that the exploitation of schoolgirls is still a “worrying trend and a lucrative business” (UN Human Rights Council 5–6).

Conflict between generations is a third theme that has not changed with the change of generations. Perhaps the clearest example is that provided by *Battle Royale*. *Battle Royale* is a Japanese graphic novel, film, and the subject of numerous diverse adaptations. Its hugely popular story features a group of Japanese high school students who are sent to a remote island and forced to battle each other to their bloody deaths (“Battle Royale”). The film, in the words of its director, Fukusaku Kinji, is set in the “context of children versus adults.” It ends with a striking message: “Run”. Kinji describes this as “my words to the next generation of young people” and that this violent film was his way of “saying some words to the children” (Sharp and Mes). While many of the younger generation responded with enthusiasm, the film also proved so controversial that members of the Japanese Diet attacked it as “very harmful to the youth” (Sharp and Mes). The trailer for its far less popular sequel, *Battle Royale II:*

Requiem, ends with an even more unambiguous message proclaimed by some of the characters: “We refuse to forgive any of the adults who made us murder each other. Let us rise up and fight together. We now declare war against every last adult!” (“Battle Royale 2 Trailer [With Subs]”).

Over a decade has now passed since *Battle Royale* was produced, yet its message still finds an audience. Japan today has hundreds of thousands of youth *hikikomori* (people who shut themselves in their house for extended periods of time), truants, and students going through the infamous college-entrance “exam hell” (*juken jigoku*). These and other issues speak to the ongoing societal pressures on youth and the continued inability of the older generations to devise convincingly satisfactory solutions (Jozuka; Lewis).

It is clear, therefore, that issues of patriarchal authority, prostitution, and intergenerational conflict (and in some cases the combination of all three) are still prevalent in Japan today, and so are performances of the aforementioned plays that deal with them. This prompts the question: are similar issues present in the United States and other nations? And if so, could these plays also speak to those as well?

These plays appear to have never been performed in the United States or other nations, so it is impossible to analyze any direct evidence to this effect, however the reception of other examples of Japanese theatre outside Japan gives some indication. American audiences, for instance, are not entirely new to Japanese theatre. Betsuyaku’s past collaborator, Suzuki, has toured extensively to critical acclaim. Betsuyaku himself has also not completely escaped Western attention. Japanese director K. Kiyama has successfully toured a production of Betsuyaku’s *Godot Has Come* (*Yattekita Godot*,

2007) to Europe, with performances in Cork, Oslo, Paris, and Berlin (“On Waiting and forgetting - ‘Godot has come’”, “Godot has come”). Betsuyaku’s plays have also been read in a 2010 training session of the Manhattan Experimental Theater Workshop (Flinn).

To date, there has only been one instance of one of a play by Betsuyaku or Yokouchi being presented by a Western theatre company: Betsuyaku’s *The Cherry in Bloom*, translated by Robert T. Rolf, produced by Bucknell University Theatre and Dance Department in February 2017. I was the director. The play was produced on a minimal budget and was acted, directed, and stage-managed entirely by undergraduate students. As such, it is best described as an experimental beginning to bringing Betsuyaku’s work to Americans, not a high-profile project. Nevertheless, Betsuyaku’s own beginnings as a playwright were also as an undergraduate college student, and college productions must therefore be given due importance. With this in mind, I present this performance and its positive reception as evidence for cautious optimism regarding American audience’s reception of Betsuyaku’s work (and potentially that of other modern Japanese playwrights). I will therefore describe the process in greater detail for the purpose of understanding some of the obstacles theatre artists face in bringing modern Japanese theatre to Western audiences, how these obstacles might be overcome, and the potentially rewarding outcomes that are possible.

One obstacle many Western theatre artists (especially those in the US) will face when attempting to produce Japanese theatre is the objection that actors from the United States can never understand the cultural nuance of a play from Japan and are therefore incapable of performing it in a respectful or “authentic” manner. Some argue that the production of a Japanese play is especially problematic if the actors are not all ethnically

East Asian (some would say they must be specifically Japanese). The argument goes that any casting decisions that stray outside these racial parameters would constitute “yellowface”, a form of cultural appropriation similar to Katy Perry’s highly-controversial performance dressed as a stereotypical imitation of a geisha (Feeney). While this argument is rooted in the desire to promote cultural respect, it can, when carried to puritanical extremes, result in complete paralysis.

It is not my intention to put forth a holistic thesis on the complex and highly-charged topic of cultural appropriation here, however I will explain how I dealt with it in this one instance in order to provide one example for consideration. From the beginning of my process, I knew that there would be no possibility that the foreign cast would ever perfectly replicate the way in which a Japanese company would produce the play. This did not mean that we should give up, however. We could never be “perfectly authentic”, firstly and most fundamentally, because we were working in English. Secondly, I was the only one on the team who had ever been to Japan or spoke any Japanese. Thirdly, only one Asian-American actor auditioned for the production, and the five-person cast ended up comprising four different ethnicities: Asian-American, Caucasian, African-American, and Arab (the diversity was enhanced by a Latina stage manager). It was therefore clear from the beginning that we could not reasonably aspire to create a performance that was fully Japanese (and to create one that was fully Western would do injustice to the play); however, that was no reason we could not create a performance that was thought-provoking, entertaining, and valuable in both its content and its hybridization of culture. I said as much in my pre-show announcement at each performance in order to promote realistic expectations among the audience.

The reception was encouraging, both in general and in regards to these issues of cultural sensitivity. The chair of the university theatre and dance department (who is Asian American) described the production as “respectful” and “reverent” towards Japan. One Asian student I spoke with in the audience felt that the play gave “representation” to a marginalized kind of theatre. The four Japanese students at the university, all of whom had joined the cast for a discussion during the rehearsal process, each expressed support for the show after its completion.

Interestingly, the Japanese students’ feelings differed about the “Japanese-ness” of the production. One felt she was seeing an American play because the actors were mostly from the United States; another felt the opposite and described how images of Japanese people from his own memory and imagination kept appearing in his mind superimposed on the racially diverse cast. A third felt that it was “strange” at first to see foreigners with Japanese names, but that as the play progressed he soon forgot about the “strange-ness” and became engrossed in the action. He added that he understood that crossing racial lines was a “sensitive issue” in the United States, but that he did not feel his “culture was offended.” While this encouraging, it is not my purpose to extrapolate this event to a complete methodology for navigating the politically fraught waters of cross-cultural theatre or to claim that I have perfectly achieved it. My experience with *The Cherry in Bloom*, nevertheless, suggests that cultural differences are by no means an insurmountable obstacle.

My experience also speaks to the great impact modern Japanese theatre can have on a US audience. In a post-show discussion, one viewer commented that the play opened his eyes to a new type of theatre. When asked if the play had relevance to Americans,

another replied that she felt it touched on universal themes of intergenerational conflict. She elaborated that raising children (a major topic of the play) is never easy and parents in every generation and in every culture could make the same mistake as the characters in the play: that of employing overly-invasive parenting techniques, thinking they know what is best while actually exacerbating the problems they are attempting to solve. This is a complex and nuanced analysis, and the fact that an American could independently reach this conclusion after watching a Japanese play provides clear evidence of the play's relevance and resonance. My experience with *The Cherry in Bloom*, therefore, provides an example of the challenges those producing Japanese theatre in the United States may face, some potential strategies, and the rewarding outcomes that are possible.

The adaptation and production of other Japanese performing arts in the West is, moreover, an already a well-established phenomenon. Theatre Nohgaku is a US-based *noh* theatre company that produces original English-language *noh* plays and trains American actors in *noh* performance technique (“About Us”). Chilean theatre company Silencio Blanco (“White Silence”) has adapted and experimented with the technique of *bunraku* puppetry, reinventing the traditional form to accommodate new usages of lights, sound effects, set pieces, special effects, and whimsically-designed puppets painted solid white (“Silencio Blanco: Chiflón, El Silencio del Carbón”). The renowned US-based theatre troupe SITI Company offers annual summer training sessions in a combination of the Viewpoints movement technique (developed in the West) and the movement technique developed by Tadashi Suzuki (“Training”).

Butoh, an emotionally provocative Japanese postmodern dance form that originated in the 60s alongside the little theatre movement, has found a surprisingly

enthusiastic international audience. One of the most clearly explicit demonstrations of *butoh*'s ability to cross cultural lines occurred in 2007. In that year, in New York City, a group of American dancers collaborated with Japanese dancer-choreographer Kasai Akira to produce a show entitled "Butoh America" (Kourlas). *Butoh* enthusiasts are spread throughout the United States: the group "Butoh Chicago", for instance, makes it their mission to expand the "butoh performance community Chicago and beyond" ("Butoh Chicago"). In this and other ways, artists and enthusiasts of multiple backgrounds strive to establish the roots of this Japanese art form in American soil.

Cultural barriers can prove significant, and misunderstandings are almost inevitable, but that has not stopped the tide of cultural exchange. On the Japanese side, *shingeki* was itself born out of a desire to emulate another culture's theatre. American theatre is well-known in Japan and some types of Japanese performing arts have already established a firm foothold in the United States and other nations. Would it not be fitting for modern Japanese theatre to follow the trend?

Understanding the Present by Means of the Past and the "Self" by Means of the "Other"

"People have always endeavored to understand antiquity by means of the present," says Nietzsche. He then asks "shall the present now be understood by means of antiquity?" (Doerries 1). Both *The Little Match Girl* and *The King of La Mancha's Clothes* mirror the spirit of their time through the frame of a fairy tale from another time. Hans Christian Andersen is not exactly "antiquity". Those who use his fairy tales, however, to frame discussions of the twentieth century use a strategy similar to that which Nietzsche describes: understanding the present by means of the past. Further, the

fairy tales that both playwrights use are from a culture different from their own. They thus comment on their own society through the frame of a story that originated in another society. They understand the “self” by means of the “other”.

In this thesis, I have argued that both of these plays closely reflect the spirits of the time periods in which they were created, yet also transcend those time periods. If these plays were to be performed today in the West, they would be divorced from both their original historical context and their original cultural context. This temporal and cultural distance between the United States in the twenty-first century and Japan in the twentieth century can be compared with that between Japan in the twentieth century and Denmark in the nineteenth century. Both are separated by roughly one-hundred years and half the earth. Japanese theatre artists reflected their own society through stories from another time and culture. Through these stories, they provocatively facilitated reflection on some of their society’s most serious ills and the corresponding possibilities for social betterment. Could we²⁰ not reflect on our society in the same way and to similar effect? Could not *The Little Match Girl* and *The King of La Mancha’s Clothes* frame a provocative discussion of the contemporary United States? In other words, could an American theatre company help Americans reflect on their own society in new and potent ways through producing one of these Japanese plays?

Further research and theatrical experimentation is needed to answer these questions. Not every production of every play is successful. There are a wide variety of contributing factors such as cast, director, design team, producer, budget, location, advertising method, theatre architecture, ticket prices, etc. What is clear, however, is that

²⁰ Used in reference to myself, as an American, and my fellow Americans.

these plays have so far reflected the emperors, prostitutes, and children of both the 60s and the 90s, and they continue to find enthusiastic audiences today. Given their staying power in Japan, and the fact that Japanese performing arts have found receptive audiences in the United States in the past (and in my own experience), there is evidence that these plays could also find a welcome home in the United States. If they did, moreover, this would also be an encouraging sign that they might find resonance in other Western countries, and other nations beyond.

If *The Little Match Girl* or *The King of La Mancha's Clothes* were to be performed in the United States, this would undoubtedly open a window into Japanese culture and society. This would not be their only value, however, for the issues the plays deal with transcend time and culture. Japanese productions of these plays have allowed deep reflection, and the corresponding possibility for change in thought and action among Japanese audiences for decades. American productions of *The Little Match Girl* and *The King of La Mancha's Clothes* could thus also provide powerful lenses in which we could, as well, see *our own* society reflected, possibly prompting new consideration of the ways in which it too could be constructively changed.

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