

After Tsu Nishi's bunkasai last weekend, I took the opportunity to travel a little bit and visit some places that I had never seen before in Japan. On Sunday, I went to Kobe with two friends, where we had lunch in Chinatown and had a chance to see a few sights around town before we headed off to the real event of the day. We hopped on the train to Takarazuka, where we saw a musical and revue. It was like nothing I had ever seen before.

Just this summer, when I was at home, I saw a musical on Broadway for the first time. I like musicals, but I was surprised to see the live show with all the colorful costumes, dancing and singing—it was more fun than I would have imagined! So even though I had heard mixed reviews about Takarazuka, it seemed like such a uniquely Japanese experience that I really wanted to see it, at least once. The name of the show that we went to see was "JAZZY な養成たち," which I didn't understand at all. Before seeing it, all I knew was that it was about 4 Irish men from the same orphanage in who find each other in America. Now, after seeing it, I don't understand much more than that. I found the format to be much different from a Broadway show, at least the one that I had seen, in that there was a lot of dialog and action in the show that was not singing or dancing. After the dramatic portion of the show ended, there was a revue that seemed much more reminiscent of musicals that I am used to at home, but it was so loud and active, and the costumes so dazzling, that I walked out of the theater in a bit of a daze.

Now, don't get me wrong—I was really impressed by the show although I was equally confused and overwhelmed. The whole idea of Takarazuka is so new to me, that I was interested to see such a performance where all the parts are played by women who have endured such rigorous training for their roles. But it was still a little strange to see lots of women of all ages clamoring to get the latest posters and pin-ups (although I, too, got some souvenirs so I can't criticize anyone else for being interested). It was definitely a fun experience. I had heard a little bit about Takarazuka in the past year, so I was happy to finally see it for myself and uncover some of the mystery.

Since our school had two substitute holidays on Monday and Tuesday, I spent the day Tuesday in Kyoto, one of the places I visited in my first trip to Japan about 7 years ago. I have to be honest and say that the first time I came to Japan, I didn't like it. The language and cultural differences were so overwhelming that I was almost scared of my surroundings, and although I was amazed to see a lot of the things that I did, I wasn't able to appreciate it as much as I could now. After I went home from Japan, I became more interested in learning other languages so that I wouldn't have such an experience again. In addition to the fact that I got to know my family's Japanese friends better and see my brother's life in Japan on my second visit, I started to become

more and more interested in Japanese culture. After managing to survive in France for a year on my own, I decided that I was ready to come back and give Japan another chance.

I hardly remembered the names of the places that I visited that first time that I went to Kyoto. I don't know if it was jetlag, heatstroke (it was a very hot June that year) or a combination of the two, but a lot of that trip was a blur. So I particularly enjoyed going back to Kyoto last week to see some things again, as well as some places that I hadn't seen before, and actually be able to read the signs and understand a lot better than the last time I was there. I was surprised how many little details I actually did remember. When we were on the bus, I remembered the neighborhood near Sanjusangendo, and realized it was nearby before the driver even announced it. It was really nice to visit Kyoto again. Even though there is still so much there that I haven't seen, I felt a big sense of accomplishment when I compared my first visit to this one.

This was just another reminder that even though I have been in Japan for more than a year, I will always have new experiences. Even if I do the same things again this year, my better understanding of Japanese will hopefully help me appreciate the same things even more. I guess I won't be running out of journal topics anytime soon!