

**University of Iceland**  
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# **In pursuit of “Ideal”**

*A contemporary vision of Japanese body aesthetic*

**Bachelor degree**

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# Abstract

This thesis discusses contemporary vision of Japanese body aesthetics and its influence on Japanese society under the pressure of beauty industry; how body aesthetics have developed and their relation with perceived Japanese qualities. The research mainly focuses on women, although men's body aesthetics are discussed shortly. Japanese manners and ways to achieve an aesthetical ideal are analyzed. The thesis is split into four parts: first is an observation of historical beauty norms throughout the Heian (794-1185) and Edo (1600-1868) periods, as well as a study of influences of traditional body aesthetics on modern beauty perception. The second part focuses on studying various methods of beauty procedures and beauty products in Japan, dieting processes and acceptance of new globalized forms of beauty. The third part examines the impact and promotion of the beauty industry that forms body aesthetics ideals as well as the relation between body aesthetics and confidence. In the fourth part, based on a conducted questionnaire and a discussion – a suggestion is made whether there is a new way of women's empowerment through a notion of sexual appeal.

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## Introduction

There can be no objective rule of taste which shall determine by means of concepts what is beautiful (Kant, 1914). However, throughout the centuries people of various cultures and ethnicities have expressed their vision of body aesthetics “ideal”, praising it through art and fashion. The Japanese are not an exception with their own unique perception of body aesthetics.

While flicking through TV channels one evening during my youth, an interesting scene caught my attention. I saw an Asian beauty, with her white face, and she was dancing slowly but very gracefully. From head to toe each one of her movements was carefully considered and performed. The scene I was watching turned out to be part of a documentary about geishas. For the past few years the image of that delicate young woman, with her distinctive white face and slender figure wrapped in a beautiful kimono, was a natural association for me. It formed a large part of my perception of Japanese body aesthetics.

The portrayal above serves as one of the many stereotypical and familiar images of Japanese women in the minds of many in the West, instantly latched onto by those who have not explored Japanese culture in any sort of depth. Some years later, while browsing the Internet, I came across an article about modern Japanese concepts of fashion and beauty among young people. To say that I was taken aback by the content of the editorial is an understatement. It detailed an astonishing divergence from the aforementioned standard notion of classic Japanese pale-skinned beauty, replete with pin-straight jet-black hair, and humble neutral makeup. Instead of this typically traditional portrayal, the article focused on modern liberal expressions of appearances. It showed youths with edgy snaggleteeth, wacky double eyelids, and even eye bag makeup.

Furthermore, the article included photos that showed groups of young girls with heavily tanned skin, bleached blonde hair and vibrant makeup. The write-up explained that this style was an alternative Japanese beauty and fashion vogue called *ganguro*<sup>1</sup>, the peak of which was during 2000's. This trend aimed to imitate the style of sun-kissed surfer girls and boys from California. It fascinated me to see how drastic the change of style was from the norm, and how open and accepting the nation was of something seemingly so different.

The extravagant and dramatic fashion styles of *ganguro* shunned the traditional notion of Japanese beauty — untanned, pure white, and unblemished skin and dark hair (as cited by Prough, 2016, p.167). A decade has already passed since *ganguro*'s heyday, yet my investigation into understanding the evolution of the booming beauty industry in Japan has evolved into intense research.

From 2015 I spent a year in Japan studying in Tokyo. My personal observations and research, as well as my professional work in the industry at one of Tokyo's largest beauty retailers, gave me an insight into modern Japanese attitudes towards personal presentation and beauty. Before I started my duties as a cosmetic consultant at the popular pharmaceutical branch Ainz&Tulpe, I had been informed and educated about which cosmetic products are effective at improving various skin problems that affect Japanese customers. This indicates the level of significance given to this concern. During my time at Ainz&Tulpe I saw that Japanese women spent copious amounts of money on cosmetic products. I also worked in the skincare section and it was here that I discovered that a large number of Japanese men are also very diligent and knowledgeable when it comes to taking care of their skin. Current statistics show that

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<sup>1</sup> The word *ganguro* can be translated as "burn-black look", "dark tanning", "black-face"

the cosmetic market in Japan, of which men's cosmetics account for about ten percent of the total, is the second largest in the world, second only to the United States (Japan External Trade Organization, 2011).

While working at the mentioned drugstore, I noticed that the most extensive and well-stocked section was dedicated to skin whitening products. This seemed to me to clearly indicate that the trend of having white skin is on the rise again, even though pale skin has always been recognised and revered throughout the history of Japan. Secondly, most of the Japanese women that used hair dye opted to change from darker chocolate brown to lighter honey tones. In addition to this many women also used hazel colour contact lenses, a lighter tone than the usual Japanese eye chroma. In the kaleidoscopic and hip Tokyo fashion districts such as Shinjuku, Shibuya and Harajuku it is becoming rarer to see natural black hair. Instead the brown haired look rules right now and is said to be '*kawaii*', that is, to be cuter.

Finally, I observed that if the trend followed by European women on emphasising their eyes or lips is on the rise, then the current Japanese counterpart to that phenomenon is emphasising the condition of their skin and attaining a healthy, pure and resonant 'glow effect'.

This research paper will be focused on the contemporary vision of Japanese body aesthetics and its impact on Japanese women, additionally, some main aspects of men's body aesthetics will be mentioned, because they have undergone changes as well and overall modern Japanese men have become very body-conscious. While examining topics on women's body aesthetics and their pursuit of beauty, the following question will be posed: are self-esteem and appearance related and whether this form of empowerment helps to achieve life goals more easily. In order to better comprehend the

topic the historical criteria of beauty as well as aesthetic traditions that influenced current beauty trends will be observed. Nowadays, it is widely accepted, that the beauty industry's impact on people of all generations around the world and especially in modern Japan through media-delivered promotions, plays a huge role forming the notion of "ideal" in body aesthetics (Miller, 2006). Also, I want to analyse whether the western definition of sexuality carries the same or different meaning for Japanese women and how it gains popularity as a part of body aesthetics culture.

## Methodology

The research for this thesis was primarily based on academic sources, books and on-line articles, a survey; and also fieldwork method such as working in the Ainz&Tulpe drugstore chain as a beauty consultant and participating in cosmetics products and treatments trade fairs such as COSMETOKYO 2016 and Beauty World Japan 2016 helped to form certain opinions on the contemporary body aesthetics.

The survey was aimed at younger Japanese people, through which they were interviewed and their answers were analysed. The majority of the participants were females as they showed more interest towards the theme. The survey was based on the constructed interviews and in some rare cases it has been sent directly to the participant and was answered online through the Facebook social media website. The questions were composed using multiple choice, ranking and a comment box. For clarification six photos were included. From left to right were photos of six famous women: Sasaki Nozomi – Japanese actress, Tominaga Ai – Japanese high-fashion model, Kumi Koda – Japanese rhythm and blues singer, Naomi Watanabe – Japanese comedian, ROLA – half-Japanese TV personality and Scarlett Johansson – Hollywood actress. The

interviews were conducted throughout May of 2016 mainly on the International Christian University grounds. The total number of participants was 48 individuals, of which 81,25% were females. 90% of the participants were in the age section between 21 to 30 years old.

The main purpose of the interviews was to gain an insight into young Japanese people's habits in regards to the use of cosmetics, and furthermore to know what are the goals of using those specific products; to enquire, whether the usage of make-up was specifically aimed to boost self-confidence for instance at job interviews; as well as to understand what is the perceived contemporary desirable female body aesthetic based on the comparison to six categories of female body depictions through the images of popular idols. The original language of the survey was Japanese, however the document has been translated into English and both of them are presented in the appendix at the end of the thesis.



## Chapter 1 – Beauty Standards During the Heian and Edo Period

Throughout human history celebration of body aesthetics has taken place in a lot of cultures around the world (i.e. ancient Egypt, ancient Greece, Roman Empire, Renaissance Europe and etc.) and philosophers like for example Kant refers to the human figure as the ideal of beauty (Kant, 1914, p. section 17). In this thesis the term 'body aesthetics' implies the principal care of the body and adjustments made to one's appearance. This chapter will examine the Japanese ideal of beauty in the Heian (794-1185) period, as it is perceived as the epitome of Japanese classical beauty and finesse and Edo (1600- 1868) period: indicating major beauty treatments and tools used at that time; and further, discussing the influence of traditional body aesthetics formed in the past and their influence on contemporary projection of beauty.

The concept of body aesthetics varies all over the world and has no universal standard. One possible exception to this statement might be the attractiveness of clean, flawless skin. An acute awareness of the need for a high standard of dermal care can be traced back to the ancient dynasties of Japan. Traditionally the beauty standards from centuries ago emphasized pale, translucent skin (Miller, 2006, p. 35). From the Heian period (794–1185), both women and men whitened their faces with a variety of substances; a powder made from rice, a liquid made from seeds of the jalap plant, or white lead mixed with some type of a starchy substance (Casal, 1966). For anyone to be considered attractive in the Heian period they needed to be refined, elegant, and sensitive. These qualities were expressed vigorously through poetry. However, appearance also played an important role in portraying these desirable traits. Historically, not all women were able to pursue the cultural portrayal of ideal beauty, since the desire or ability to display pale skin was limited by one's class status. Bones of

Edo-period samurai women show levels of lead contamination three-fold greater than that of the bones of women from farming and fishing communities (Miller, 2006). A court lady ideally had a pale, round, plump face with elongated eyes. The eyebrows were plucked and repainted somewhat higher than their original orientation. Gleaming white teeth were thought to be horribly ghoul-like, so they were purposefully darkened. A positive assessment of chubbiness was also common at the time, as shown by contemporary admiring descriptions such as “well- rounded and plump” (*tsubutsubu to fuetaru*) and “plump person” (*fukuraku naru hito*) (Morris, 1994, p. 202). Besides this, extremely long hair, longer than one’s body, was a standard for Heian beauty norms. As for Heian male beauty customs, in many ways they were quite similar to those for female beauty. Although men did not shave their eyebrows, idealised depictions of handsome men show the eyebrows to be quite high on the forehead. Men would ideally have a thin moustache and a thin tuft of beard at the chin. Large quantities of facial hair, however, detracted substantially from one's attractiveness (Figal & Smits, 2001).

Back in the Heian period, the term of *Akita bijin* was born, describing very beautiful women from Akita prefecture and some other parts of Tōhoku<sup>2</sup>. There is a certain “something” that young women from that area seem to have, and when people talk about their ideal woman, or who the most beautiful women are in Japan, *Akita bijin* may come up. A special feature of the Akita beauties is the whiteness of their skin. The qualities an *Akita bijin* are said to have include white, pale skin, a round face, straight brow, double eyelids, small nose, small mouth with full lips (Francisco, 2014).

During the Edo period (1603–1867), the preference for long and loose hair gave way to elaborate, upswept styles, or buns at the back of the neck. The trend seems to

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<sup>2</sup> Tōhoku region is the north-eastern portion of Honshu, the largest island of Japanese archipelago.

have started with courtesans and fashionable merchants' wives. There were several categories of hairstyles for courtesans, brides, and married women, among which the most famous hairstyle was called *shimada*. The hair was gathered together at the crown of the head and a small portion of the bun was sectioned off to point outward; often the hairstyles required adding pads, frames and combs and a thick greasy substance was applied to keep these styles intact. Many wealthy women had their hair styled twice a week. Some of them often wore the style up to ten days in a row without washing their hair. Women slept on their backs, using special pillows and rolls for the neck that propped up their heads so the hairstyles would not come apart (Sherrow, 2006, p. 222).

In present day Japan, an oval face with a tall nose tends to be favoured. However, this is not entirely due to Western influence (Kyo, 2012). Professor Kyo refers to a research conducted by forensic anthropologist Suzuki Hisashi on the skeletons of the Tokugawa family and their women. According to his investigation, many Tokugawa women had narrower faces and relatively tall noses. Suzuki suggests that the features of shogun consorts were similar to those of women portrayed in Edo period *ukiyo-e*<sup>3</sup>. Needless to say, the skull bones alone do not solely determine facial appearance. Weight, skin colour, and other features greatly influence looks. Nevertheless, judgments about beauty rely heavily on the perceived attractiveness of the face. Delicate differences in the mouth, the shape of lips and eyes, and the balance of the eyelids are double or single also greatly affects aside from the fundamental question of which was favoured the given age, in what can be conjectured from skeletal bones is naturally limited. It is nevertheless possible to estimate Edo taste in features (Kyo, 2012, p. 6). A *Handbook of Cosmetics in the Capital* by the cosmetics researcher Sayama

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<sup>3</sup> A genre of woodblock prints and paintings depicting landscapes, tales, the theatre, and the pleasure quarters.

Hanshichimaru, published in 1813, states the criteria for beautiful eyes. "Because the eyes are at the centre of the face and the first in bringing out the facial features, they should have dignified strength. Yet, eyes that are too large are unsightly. Some people narrow their eyes, forcefully attempting to make them smaller, but the eyelids and outer corners of the eyes become wrinkled producing a squint. This worsens the looks of the eyes". The expression "dignified strength" refers to the gaze, and does not mean large eyes. As is clear from the above statement, eyes that are too large were thought to be unappealing during the Edo period (1600 -1867), and deemed to be rather "unattractive" (p. 18)

It was also during the heyday of the Edo period that the fashion for fair skin spread among common citizens. *Ukkiri*, a term for moist, naturally coloured skin, appeared in a manual on beauty that was titled *Miyako fūzoku kewaiden* (A Handbook of Cosmetics in the Capital). Published in 1813, this manual remained a bible of beauty standards throughout the next century. The work introduced a range of techniques for making the skin “beautifully white”, including facial cleansing, facial packs made from a natural mineral form of lead oxide, and herbal treatments for acne (Bifue, 2013).

Tomizawa Yōko, a researcher at Pola Research Institute of Beauty and Culture, describes the roots of the affinity for natural coloured white skin:

The tone the Japanese seek to achieve is not milky white but translucent, like a polished stone. Since the Edo period, women have gone to great pains to achieve this (Bifue, 2013).

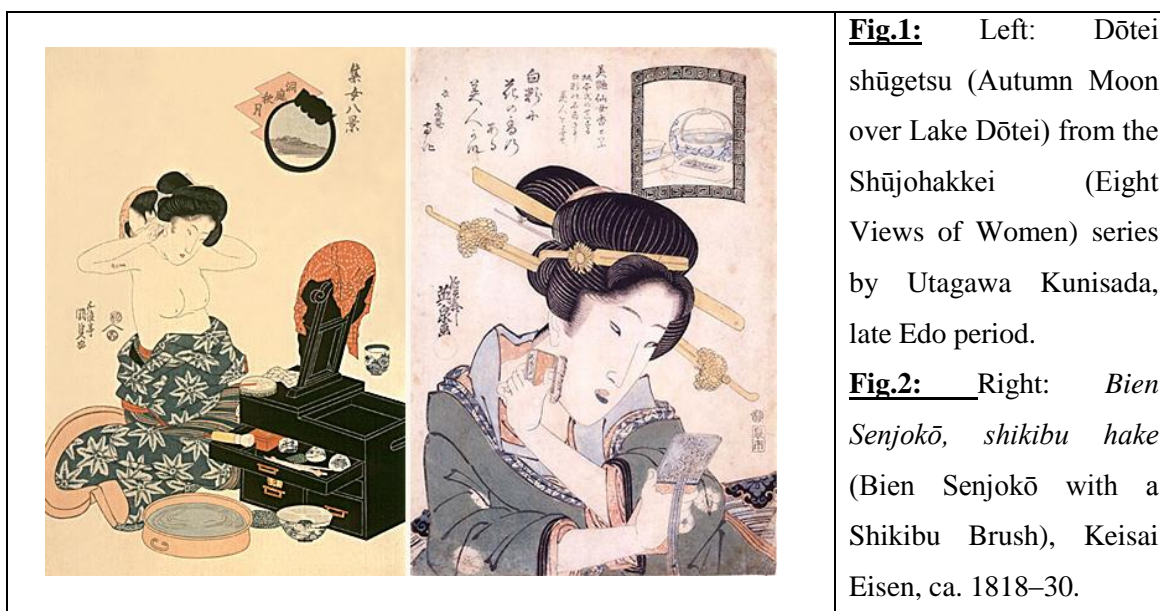


Figure A Includes Figure 1 and 2 of Edo period makeup and hair styles (Bifue, 2013)

As is seen in Figure 1, the woman strips to her waist to keep the white powder she is applying to her face from staining her kimono. Traditionally, women not only put makeup on their face but also on their ears, the nape of their neck, and chest. In Figure 2, Bien Senjokō was a brand of *oshiroi* powder, popular at the end of the Edo period. This print depicts a courtesan applying the whitener with a brush (Bifue, 2013). In Figure 1 and Figure 2, both women have quite complicated hair styles. During the Edo period gathering and waxing hair was a usual practice for women, as for nowadays *shimada* – a traditional way of hair styling, is mainly limited to geisha and also it is worn as a wig for the traditional Japanese wedding ceremonies (Sherrow, 2006, p. 222).

Even though wearing make-up was considered to be a form of admirable etiquette, it was also an important procedure for women as a means to enhance one's beauty, which in its turn allowed them to come closer to a goal of matching the ideal

appearance of those times. The primary life purpose and desire of Heian and Edo women – was to have a successful marriage. Often, in cases when the bride's family did not exude affluence, having a beautiful outward appearance was the only way for a woman of that era to pursue a husband (Chapkis, 1986). This indicates that already then attractive appearance was a form of empowerment that helped to achieve life goals more easily. Some of the traditional body aesthetics formed during those times remain even today.

## Chapter 1.1 – Influence of Traditions

This chapter is going to discuss the influence of traditional body aesthetics on modern beauty trends including production of beauty products.

Following World War II, beginning in the 1950s, Japanese culture was heavily influenced by the American mass media, especially magazines and movies. In 1954, pancake makeup<sup>4</sup> was introduced to Japan from the US, and from that time onward makeup cosmetics became a focus of general interest of Japanese women. In the 1960s, the trend in cosmetics shifted to an emphasis on makeup for the eyes and mouth, and starting about 1975, fads such as the surfer look and heavily made-up eyebrows held in thrall women in their teens and twenties in particular (Japan Cosmetic Industry Association).

If the custom during the Heian period was for people to use whitening powder substances to achieve flawless fair skin, then the modern-day equivalent of that practice is to use white makeup (*oshiroi*). *Oshiroi* is often used to achieve the perfect skin look

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<sup>4</sup> Cosmetics make up in cake form applied to the face with a sponge in order to cover up imperfections and even out skin tone (Collins Dictionaries)

at events such as weddings, in the theater, and by performing geisha. However, the popularity of the white powder '*oshiroi*' has also extended its influence to the average Japanese consumer. For instance, in the spring of 2016 a Japanese cosmetic manufacturer chain Noevir Co., Ltd. (more commonly known by the name 'Sana') brought to the market a new line of decorative cosmetic products,



Figure B Maikohan's advertisement of products (Sana, 2016)



Figure C Shiseido's "instantaneous and lifelong" advertisement (Shiseido, 2013)

released under the name of "MAIKOHAN". The

concept of this line of products is to focus on the makeup techniques and ingredients that are commonly used by *maiko*, *geiko*<sup>5</sup> and *geisha*. Beautiful *maiko* girls are displayed on the banner advertisements with a traditional makeup; red eyeliners, and fair skin. Even if other Japanese brands do not directly feature classical *geisha* images for their marketing campaigns then it is interesting to observe how they adapt and update that traditional icon to a more contemporary interpretation. In 2014, Shiseido used an advertisement where the fundamental makeup elements and beauty features of traditional *geishas* were tweaked and adjusted in order to create a much more modern appearance (Figure C).

<sup>5</sup> A *maiko* (舞妓) is an apprentice *geiko* (not exactly same as *geisha*). Their school is in Kyoto, western Japan. Their jobs consist of performing songs, dances, and playing the shamisen or the *koto* (traditional Japanese instruments) for visitors during feasts. *Maiko* are usually aged 15 to 20 years old and become *geiko* after learning how to dance the traditional dances, play the shamisen, and learning *Kyō-kotoba* (dialect of Kyoto), regardless of their origins.

In recent times the images of *geishas* have become hugely popular among worldwide audiences, so much so that even an American-based brand called 'Tatcha' featured an image of a *geisha* in its marketing campaign. The CEO and founder of Tatcha, Victoria Tsai, was inspired by the beauty and elegance of the *geishas*. She sees the geisha as a global icon of allure and attractiveness, honing the art of beauty for centuries, whose secrets are the result of many cultures, and can be applied across the world (Woo, 2013).

Besides Shiseido, there is a current trend among the majority of Japanese cosmetic companies such as Kosé, SKII, Sensai, Kanebo, Canmake and etc. to use images of fair skin people as a desirable standard of beauty. This contemporary vogue contrasts to the predominant fashion of the 90's and the early 2000's. During that period the primary aesthetic ideal amongst young Japanese women was to have tanned skin, and this *ganguro* style was constantly promoted in the fashion magazines and advertisements of the era. In fact, the subculture of *ganguro* spread so widely across Japan that under its influence the goal of having tanned skin turned into a form of an ideal body aesthetic for that period of time (Prough, 2016). However, Astalift, a Japanese cosmetic company, recently used an interesting way of promoting whitening and anti-aging care products through a television commercial. This 2016 advert featured a 31-year-old woman who is portrayed as being a devotee of the *ganguro* style since she was 16. The lady featured in this advertisement works as a food coordinator. She explains that it takes a lot of time to maintain this style, and she finds it challenging to use it for her everyday appearance. Consequently, this issue causes her anxiety. She has to make a choice between "black" and "white" skin. The lady decides to "graduate from a 'black style'" in order to succeed in her career. At the end of the advert she is



portrayed as being much more fresh, a youthful looking young women with fair skin (FUJIFILMjapan, 2016).

Tomizawa Yōko, a researcher at Pola Research Institute of Beauty and Culture, feels that the Japanese belief that flawless, pristine skin is the key to beauty, a notion that remains unchanged from the Heian period, will continue to be at the very foundation of attitudes to beauty no matter what contemporary trends may assert:

Young Japanese continue to be swept up by various trends, including the *ganguro* [“black face”] and small-face looks. Nevertheless, women still want to have skin with a smooth texture; skin like glass. The recent boom in ‘beautifully white’ is an indication that we have returned to our starting point—the Japanese adulation of light skin (Bifue, 2013).

It is evident that the beauty industry is heavily promoting the current aesthetic fashion of having pale, fair skin. It executes this campaign through a range of influential mediums such as advertisements, social media, and magazines. The pinnacle of contemporary Japanese body aesthetics is rapidly shifting back to its roots, towards traditional Japanese values of beauty.

Historically, white skin was considered to be beautiful in Japan and in fact, this belief transformed into traditional beauty criteria. However, it is important to pay attention to the origins of believing that fair skin is beautiful. In ancient Japan, white skin would rather point at the status of the relation to a higher social class or even court. As such privileged women and men did not have to work in outside, so their skin preserved white. Secondly, Ashikari (2005) pointed out that whiteness idea which based on Japanese identity as a race should not be devalued simply as a beauty issue nor as western mimicry. Throughout the whole representation by mass media including TV programs, idols image, magazines, etc., light skin tone has become an important feature

for defining beauty of women (Xinyi, 2014). In terms of men, light skin tone is not associated with positive image, as they considered weak and weepy (Nishioka, 2014). Moreover, the preference of a whiter skin tone in Japan is based on two simple beliefs. First, it is said that “anything white can be decorated with any colours” meanings that it is easier apply makeup on it and secondly and probably more importantly, it is believed that tanned skin may cause the appearance of skin dryness or wrinkles and pigmentation (Nishioka, (Part 1) Is White Skin Better? Japanese Women's Skin Whitening [Video file], 2014). That is the actual reason for Japanese women to cover their skin from head to toe and to wear wide-rimmed hats during the Japanese humid and sunny summer. It is also important to keep in mind, that the term *bihaku* is formed of two kanji characters: one is 美(*bi*) that means beauty another is 白(*haku* or *shiro*) meaning white. There is no such similar term regarding dark skin tone, therefore meaning that into the term of *bihaku* is embedded a deep notion.

Despite the fact that traditional body aesthetics are based on natural beauty, today Japanese people use numerous beauty products, diet and in some cases plastic surgeries in order to attain the “ideal”.

## Chapter 2 – Sacrifices to attain the “Ideal”

According to statistics the cosmetic market in Japan (of which men's cosmetics account for about ten percent) is the second largest in the world after the United States. It is estimated that sales of perfume, hair-care products, skincare products and makeup accounted for around ¥1.42 trillion in 2010 (Japan External Trade Organization, 2011). Taking into consideration such figures it seems evident that Japanese people care a lot about their appearance. In fact, it embodies, for themselves and others, a sign of respect.

It was not until the late 1800s that Japan and the United States began to manufacture cosmetics for mass consumption. Before that women relied on so-called “kitchen physics”. A few decades ago a Japanese woman could use a facial cleanser made with *azuki*<sup>6</sup> beans, exfoliate her face with a homemade pouch of rice bran, and moisturize using a do-it-yourself lotion of cucumber and gourd juice (Miller, 2006, p. 9). These days there are thousands of brands and innovative cosmetic products that simplify life for the average Japanese woman without breaking their budget. An interesting tendency among both younger and older Japanese women was observed while working at the cosmetics shop of Ainz&Tulpe. It seemed that many women spent copious amounts of money on the products with a significantly higher price than on the cheaper versions. For example, SKII is the most famous Japanese high-end brand for anti-aging products and it is a cosmetic line that became popular, especially among more mature Japanese women. SKII “Illumination Aura Essence” is a skin whitening liquid that won a number of beauty awards, retailing at a price of 30,500 ¥, which is around \$300 for 75 ml. Kanebo's Twany Century Cell Rhythm SPO cream retails for \$1,250 for 40 grams. It is said to retard the aging process by seeping into skin smoothly. A spokesman for

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<sup>6</sup> *Azuki* bean is an annual vine widely grown throughout East Asia and the Himalayas. The size of it is small, approximately 5 mm, and the colour is usually red.

Kanebo told the Kyodo News, "Buyers are mostly in their 50s and 60s, and some of the women say they reward themselves for their year's work by buying our cream." (Hays, 2013). The Japanese cosmetics market is so extensive that women and men are able to find any type of product that will "fix" any type of "problem" from head to toe.

The shaving is a usual daily procedure and is an important part of body grooming. It is spread among Japanese women shave all the body parts except pubic hair and men try to wax and shave chest and back hair, as women find it unattractive (Miller, 2006). Among women a spread practice is to shave face to get a silky smooth skin. And is believed to be a key to a younger looking skin. According to Japanese beauty experts, men have unknowingly been using the age-defying technique for years. They say that the reason men seem to age slower is because they shave all the time. The shaving cream apparently moisturizes the face in all the right places, while the shave itself acts as a massage (Sumitra, 2015). There is a whole range of special products for such procedure, yet it is often done at the beauty parlors.

Hair dying is another extremely popular fad in Japan. It is continuing to be influenced by trends from the West, especially by film stars and other celebrities (Sherrow, 2006, p. 224). Today, a significant number of Japanese women dye their black hair to colour range from darker chocolate brown to more honey tone in order to differentiate from the crowd. A short hairstyle or upper shoulder length is considered cute and fashionable. To emphasize dyed hair colour, women also use hazel color contact lenses.

In spite of the tendency of spending large amounts of money on effective modern treatments, Japanese people still venerate their own traditions and hold them in high esteem. Oftentimes these long-held traditions represent an incremental process, an

example of this would be the well-known Japanese tea ceremony. For the Japanese daily skin-care routine is not just a random manner of cleansing. In fact, it is a whole combination of step-by-step procedures that can easily be likened to a ritual ceremony. Since ancient times Japanese women have known how to effectively treat and nourish their skin, and those tried and tested methods were handed down from generation to generation. According to Chizu Saeki (2012), Japan's renowned skincare guru, the morning routine consists of five steps, with each step being accompanied by a facial massage. As for evening routine it takes five to six steps for deep cleaning, toning, and a lot of moisturizing. Author writes in her book 'The Japanese Skincare Revolution', that if it takes thirty minutes to administer makeup, then the exact same amount of time should be spent removing it.

One of the most significant aesthetic features among Japanese women and men of all ages is definitely *kogao*. If a Japanese person addresses to a foreigner remarking a small shape of his or hers face, it must be considered as a compliment. In Japan, it is commonly believed that *kogao*, or in direct translation – a 'small face', is a sign of a beautiful appearance and resembles a childlike appearance, which,



Figure D. Face wrap piece to achieve the "small face" shape (Japan Info, 2016)

in its turn, deemed to be cute and adorable. For women, *kogao* embodies a small, oval-shaped face with V-line jaw, as a sign of femininity and delicateness and all young women and sometimes even young men in Japan desire to have small faces (Japan Info, 2016). In Japan, it is not a rare practice to reduce the size of a jawline and cheekbones through a plastic surgery. According to Toland, Cheng and Shaw (2004) state that while European and American women tend have body-oriented surgeries, for instance

liposuction and breast augmentation, Asian-American women usually practice surgeries related to the face (p. 59). This method is considered as the most effective one, however according to Japan Info – an information portal about Japanese trends – there are a variety of odd-looking beauty tools such as facial bras, face saunas, face belts, etc, that are used to tighten up the face (ex. in Figure D). Despite using those tools there are other methods such as *shokkaku* hairstyle or literally antenna hairstyle in English, is where two long strands of hair frame the sides of the face. The thicker the strands that frame your cheeks, the slimmer your face would look (Japan Info, 2016).

Since 2011, double-tooth (jap. *yaeba*) attachment has become a popular fad among Japanese girls. While European people visit



orthodontists at any age for teeth straightening to get the famous American 'Hollywood smile', on the other side of the globe Japanese teenagers and young women spend lots of money to purposely misalign their teeth. This is done in order to create a more 'cute' look and follow the new trend in fashion. Professor Cho Kyo describes the popular procedure in his book 'The Search for the Beautiful Woman' and explains the reasons of this fad, as well as beneficial outcomes for businesses:

Double-tooth attachment involves covering normal canine teeth in order to make them look more pointed and less straight. Around the time baby teeth are replaced by permanent teeth, children often have an uneven dental alignment. They look sweet and youthful when they smile with double-teeth. This is why, from long ago in Japan, double teeth were regarded as a symbol of sweetness and beauty in young girls. Following

the popularity of some recent doubled-toothed young stars, this look has had a devoted cult following. Teenage girls now rush to cosmetic dentists to have artificial teeth attached to their neatly aligned natural teeth. Orthodontists immediately took advantage of this trend and waged large-scale campaigns for the promotion of double-toothed stars. At the same time, they also engineered a high price list for this “esthetical” procedure. There are two types of teeth that can be attached; removable and semi-permanent. The costs may vary for artificial teeth, anywhere from \$200 up to \$1,000 (Kyo, 2012).

Emilie Zaslow, an assistant professor at Pace University in New York City who studies beauty in consumer culture, notes that *yaeba* mimics the look of delayed baby teeth, or a mouth that’s too small; “It’s this kind of emphasis on youth and the sexualization of young girls.” In 2012 the first Japanese snaggletooth pop group, TYB48, featuring three ‘yaeba-girls’, released their first single with the catchy and provocative title ‘It’s Fine If I Bite You?’ (Kingston, 2012).

Yet, the most popular cosmetic surgery in Japan might be considered the double eyelid surgery or Blepharoplasty. In case of Japan and other Asian countries, the typical procedure of this surgery is to change a “single eyelid” or “monolid” into a ‘double eyelid’ by carving a crease and shaping the form of an eyelid. 90% of Blepharoplasty surgeries that are performed in Japan include double eyelid surgery (Iwanami & Onizuka, 1984). Authors presume the reason for such fad is a relation to changing concepts of beauty among the Japanese people. As a result, Japanese patient gets wider opened, western-style eyelids and loses the sleepiness and lethargy in the flat, monotone Japanese face. The double eyelid shape of eyes is considered very attractive and promoted in fashion magazines. Those Japanese people who are desperate to match the popular face aesthetic but are not ready to ‘go under a knife’ or want to find a budget friendly option – use special transparent tape-stickers or eyelid glue and stick to

carbon-copy the look. There are many argues about the original motives that push Japanese to get double eyelids. One of them state that it allows them to impersonate westerners, while others suggest that preference for double eyelids has nothing to do with Westernization but merely a current preference for large eyes (Takemoto, 2008).

For Japanese women there are “unwritten rules” of aesthetical ideal standards for each age group. It is a country of dress code and uniforms, that for example in case of schoolgirls are often worn during their spare time, since it is considered cute and fashionable. Yet, if younger Japanese girls tend to dress very cute and even childish in their teens and early twenties, then the fashion tastes change somewhat as they mature and they start to express their feminine sexuality and elegance, wearing rather close-fitting clothes to emphasize one’s figure. As Japanese women reach middle age (which in Japan is considered to be in their forties) they dress elegantly and pay attention to formality and certain lengths when choosing clothes. However, overall Japanese tend to keep up their style with plain basics and neutral tones and rather not to stand out from the crowd, yet if a person has a personal style it is often considered as brave decision and “interesting personality”. Two major factors of Japanese body aesthetics for women are the complexion and fairness of the skin important as well as body thinness, for men it is over all highly groomed skin and hair and well-built body. Although in recent years the perfect man is considered to be a *shōshoku* or herbivore man. Images of such type of men are actively promoted in media, advertisements, manga and anime depicting a “softer” masculinity. The man has to be kind and sensitive and show his feminine side despite being outside the scope of traditional masculine boundaries (Sugata Research, 2015).



## Chapter 2.1 – It must be *kawaii*

The scope of changes is more significant for younger people, especially for the generation of prosperity. These changes may be reduced to a single term, implying a modern and post-modern phenomenon, with a wide range of meanings. That modern phenomenon is cuteness or *kawaii*, that is, "cute" or "adorable". It has become a prominent aesthetic feature of Japanese popular culture of young generations. Many things, including clothing, food, personal appearance and behavior may be characterized as *kawaii*.

Tomoyuki Sugiyama, author of "Cool Japan", believes that "cuteness" is rooted in Japan's harmony-loving culture, and Nobuyoshi Kurita, a sociology professor at Musashi University in Tokyo, stated that "cute" is a "magic term" that encompasses everything that's acceptable and desirable in Japan. "Japanese women see value in youth and want to combine childishness and cuteness with sexiness and glamour," says Sakae Nonomura, a researcher with the cosmetics company Kanebo. "Cute has now grown so widespread that various types of cute coexist." Nobuyoshi Kurita thinks it's important to watch Japan's youngsters, who see the bustling streets of downtown Tokyo, – where the cute aesthetic is born, — as the center of their universe. "Where cute goes determines the future of Japan," he said (Kageyama, 2006).

A glaring example of achieving a cute appearance for social media is through *purikura* or photography booths. They are usually can be found in game centers across Japan. Their name originates from a shortened version of the English word «print club». It is a favorite entertainment for Japanese schoolgirls, that allows to get an original photo-sticker and choose the background as well as decorations on their own, but the most attractive feature is the automatic beautification of figure and face features such as

large eyes, glooming and fair skin, long legs and thin body. Those enhanced features mimic person's proportions and achieve an adorable, cute, sometimes childish and even a doll-like look. The popular *kawaii* pose that also makes one's face appears small and in a V-shape, is by placing a hand on the cheek. This pose is also known as *mushiba pōzu*, or “cavity pose”. The hand partially covers the jaw line, which makes one's face look slimmer, which is similar to the effect caused by the *shokkaku* hairstyle (Japan Info, 2016).

Kiyoka Wada, an expert on dieting and fitness, shares her opinion to Peter Barakan in her interview on weight loss industry:

Ideal of Beauty in Japan is different from other countries; Japanese women want to look dainty and cute at all ages. Elsewhere, words like “sexy” and “gorgeous” are common compliments but in Japan it always comes down to “cute, a petite, sylphlike look” Japanese women are aspired to (NHK World, 2016).

This opinion is quite spread and some scholars have linked the popularity of the cute style and appearance to the Lolita complex, in which images of young girls, or women pretending to be young girls, are a main point of adult comics, pornography and other media (Miller, 2006, p. 25).



Figure F. The cute aesthetic, displayed by porn idol Kogure Chie. From the June 1990 cover of the adult video magazine Apple Tsūshin. (Miller, 2006).

## Chapter 2.2 – Watch Your Appetite

In spite of the defeat in World War II and recurrent tragedies due to the climate, natural disasters and unforeseen circumstances, the Japanese have successfully built a unique civilization. Post-war events and food imports have changed to some extent the traditional Japanese diet, and greater consumption of meat products explains the fact that many young Japanese men are now as tall as their European counterparts. Of course, the average Japanese body is still smaller compared to Europeans and Americans. According to the statistics, average height ranges from 170 cm to 172 cm for males and 158 cm for females (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2014). But the impetus and will for further improvements in terms of height and body shapes is palpable.

The topic of food is very popular among the Japanese, numerous magazines, the media, and personal Facebook pages testify to this. To the question of 'why?' the response is clear; Japanese are aware that they are what they eat. Food issues are discussed widely. Food, health issues and contemporary body aesthetics are interconnected. Thus, the Japanese approach to body aesthetics, consumption of seafood products, as well as physical exercise, have contributed a lot to increase the longevity of Japan's citizens.

In Japanese elementary schools it is mandatory for children to do a calisthenics regime in the playground. Besides schools, many Japanese companies and factories incorporated those exercises as a part of daily morning meetings, since they believe that this practice will improve the productivity level of employees (Nakata, 2014). Moreover,

in 2008, Japan's Ministry of Healthcare has issued a new law – “Metabo Law”<sup>7</sup> – to take active steps to minimise health risks and thereby reduce the number of employees (between the ages of 40 to 74 years) who show symptoms of metabolic syndrome, such as obesity and high blood pressure, cholesterol and blood glucose requires to have their waist measurements taken as part of an annual physical exam (Workforce Magazine, 2008). Those over set limits are provided education and support in terms of losing weight, while local governments and companies can be penalized financially (Bloise, 2014, p. 13). Although statistics show that the obesity rate in Japan is one of the lowest in the industrialised world at just 3.6% (NHK World, 2016). The idea that the obesity impacts negatively on work means Japan's men too are now searching through effective measures to lose weight (NHK World, 2016). Companies believe that well-being improves work performance. Younger men tend to try to lose weight because they want to look good and they are interested in fashion, then, as men move through middle age they exercise less, eat out more and start to experience more stress because of gained weight.

However, no matter how healthy Japanese daily rations may appear to be, the dieting craze is continuing in Japan:

Dieting is a cultural behavior in which discipline and effort are rewarded, and it may therefore be linked to specifically Japanese cultural ideas about struggle and perseverance (Miller, 2006).

No matter which beauty trend Japanese young women follow, from ‘intentionally tacky *Kogal*’<sup>8</sup> to ‘demure debutante’, all of them emphasize extreme

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<sup>7</sup> Diet consciousness – symbolized by the catchphrase “metabo” for “metabolic syndrome” (Bloise, 2014)

<sup>8</sup> *Kogal* (コギャル kogyaru) is a Japanese fashion culture which involves senior schoolgirls wearing an outfit based on their uniform, heightening their skirts similar to miniskirts. The short

thinness (Miller, 2006, p. 160). Spielvogel (2003) links thinness not simply to beauty ideology but to gender roles through dieting and food refusal that contradicts the other-directed Japanese model of femininity. Although, there are many explanations of why the Japanese are so keen on dieting, most agree that women who diet are at least partly influenced by media images (2006, pp. 160-162). Not surprisingly the extreme thinness that is constantly promoted by the media, which they assert is considered to be attractive, has resulted in an increase of eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia. According to research from the end of the past decade these disorders have already started to affect one in one hundred women (Efron, 1997).

Today, such dieting fad results as a billion profit for many companies across the world and particularly it is happening in Japan. In fact, in the late 1980-s, Japanese companies started to develop the production of enriched products with benefits beyond their nutritional value, that were named later as “functional food” (*tokutei hokenyō*<sup>9</sup>) and the country became a birthplace of this phenomena (Miller, 2006, p. 162). A whole parade of diet-items like health teas, cocoa drinks, biscuits, yoghurts, jelly drinks, supplements and etc., that are often marked as 0-calorie foods are taking over the market and becoming nationwide fads. The ‘health-food’ business, often considered as a part of the beauty industry, is large in Japan and it is the third largest market in the world. One more key factor supporting the on-going success and growth of this industry are the promotion efforts shown by the government in favor of disease prevention, notably through approved functional food, in order to reduce the medical costs related to an aging population as well as diet and lifestyle changes (Bloise, 2014, p. 13)

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skirts are worn irrespective of the season. The girls may also wear loose socks, scarves and have dyed hair.

<sup>9</sup> Food with a specific health claim

So with the increased amount of proteins and nutrition consumed by the Japanese it seems that they have become taller as a population. Even though the height of Japanese women are in keeping with the increase, the average body weight remains the same as the past six decades according to health data of the end of past decade (Japan Times, 1997). The average weight for a woman in her twenties in 1949 was around 51 kg, the same as in 1997, although women were taller by 5 cm in 1997 (Miller, 2006). In 2000, the average weight among women in their early twenties dropped to 49 kg (Asahi Shimbun, 2002), in 2014 it rose to 50 kg (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2016).

However, they preserve these bodily proportions and their charming appearances, which have been stipulated by their traditional way of life over thousands of years, perhaps also by the national clothes. It is entirely possible that the shape of traditional national clothing, such as the kimono, generates a notion of what the ideal body shape is for that particular culture. The body shape thought best suited to the kimono is slender with a willow-shaped waist. Large breasts are said to disrupt the flow of a kimono's lines. A derogatory term for a woman whose large breasts alter the desired pillar-shape is “pigeon's chest” (*hatomune desshiri*) (Miller, 2006, p. 78).

Even though the diet craze remains in Japan it is probably the most health-conscious country in the world. Besides having the highest life expectancy, there is the biggest number of centenarians per capita (Stepler, 2016). Such high life expectancy and generally good condition of health may be explained not only by different genetic structure from Westerners. Healthy eating habits are common among Japanese not merely as a temporary hobby or vogue; it is in fact their very lifestyle and cultural tradition.

## Chapter 2.3 – New Forms of Acceptation

Even the notion of a healthy lifestyle and nutritious eating habits that are constantly promoted under the ‘Metabo law’ by Japanese institutions did not save the country from avoiding the global fast-food craze. As a result of this recent trend Japan also faces the problems associated with some citizens being overweight or obese. Fortunately, the standards of beauty vary wildly in this day and age. In Western society acceptance of full-figured body shapes is highly favored. The society got tired of continuous promotion of thin, almost anorexic, body types. Therefore the accepted standard of what is beautiful started to change and evolve. Despite this, many people assert that those with a slender figure are more likely to achieve success than those with a larger frame even though there has been a recent trend in Japan, which positively endorses a curvy body shape. As Japanese people tend to invent a name for any intention, action or conception, they simply decided to call such girls and women in a sweet<sup>10</sup> manner – “Marshmallow girls” (マシュマロ女性 jap. *mashyumaro jyōsei*). A real progress for the weight-conscious Japanese society was that even a special magazine targeting such topics as fashion, shops, makeup and styling tips for more voluptuous women started to be published. ‘La Farfa’ is Japan’s first magazine geared specifically to plus-size women (Ngo, 2015) and it features models that weigh between 60 and 120 kg; a distinctive feature of the fashion magazine is that it provides the weight, the height and the body measurements of each model on the page, since according to editor in chief Harumi Kon, “it is more convenient for the readers” (Hongo, 2013). A plus size model, Goto Seina, was introduced in a magazine as a “marshmallow

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<sup>10</sup> For a long period of time, acceptance of more curvaceous women in Japan was not common and they were often offended by a rude word “fatso” (jap. *debu*)

girl". She spoke positively about the term in her blog, commenting: "It's something that makes me really happy." Being called a Marshmallow girl is a positive name for those girls who are on the bigger side but not too overweight (Brendon, 2014). Moreover, in 2015 a plus-size pop idol group "Pottya" has debuted, gaining notoriety. At their first press conference they declared, "We can't be idols if we're not slim? In order to destroy those doubts us chubby girls came together and formed an idol unit." (Ngo, 2015).

Such new forms of media positive body images of full figured women is definitely a huge step forward for Japanese society, considering the fact that most of the fashion magazines have plastic surgery and weight loss ads in the back pages.



## Chapter 3 – Influential Beauty Promotion

According to a research of Rose, Bush, and Kahle, professors of marketing (1998), “Japan and the United States have the largest economies and are arguably the most sophisticated consumer cultures in the world”, which leads to an assumption that Japan forms a perfect base for merchandisers to promote their brands. Moreover, in many other countries there is a prevailing notion that advertising is considered to be a ‘necessary evil’ by the majority of consumers. In contrast, Japan is fully integrated with the world of show business and society in general. Many Japanese consumers consider TV commercials enjoyable to watch and the appearance of popular talents, idols, and other celebrities seems to be one of the main reasons for viewer’s favourable response towards these commercials (Praet, 2001).

Japan’s capital city Tokyo – is a metropolis with a population over 13,5 million people.<sup>11</sup> Hence, it is the core of the entire commercial activity. Besides regular cosmetic products promoted by TV commercials, large advertising billboards hang figuratively in every accessible viewpoint. An impressive number of advertisements find their place in a huge organism, where Tokyoites spend a great deal of their time - at Tokyo metropolitan and JR. As the veins of this very organism, commuter trains are filled with all sorts of advertising posters. In addition to this the video boards (which are the primary means to view the train direction and stations) cyclically roll footage of promoted commercials. One of those commercials that instantly caught the attention of bored passengers was from Panasonic Beauty. They had an interesting conception of brand promotion through a series of hair, skin and body-care videos. These one-minute long videos were broadcast during the time when the trains headed to the stations. The

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<sup>11</sup> The population of the special wards is over 9 million people, with the total population of the prefecture exceeding 13 million. (Tokyo Metropolitan Government)

name of the series is “BeauTV~VoCE” and they feature *wanpointobyūtīkōza* or “one point beauty course”, followed by broadcasting actual airtime TV entertainment programs. The train-advertising campaign launched in mid-August of 2014<sup>12</sup>. The images of young slender beauties as well as handsome men, with luminous bright skin, (Chapkis, 1986) hairless bodies were depicted promoting various beauty techniques, massages, and exercises in order to demonstrate that the aesthetic look is achievable by everybody. One of the outcomes of this is that the upkeep of beauty routines and adaptations to on-going body aesthetics have become normalised through commercials and media exposure. Although Chapkis (1986:5) is describing the situation of gender attitudes in American society, her words may still be applicable to people in Japan as well:

“Each woman is somehow made to feel an intensely private shame for her ‘personal’ failure. She is alone in the crowd pushing toward the cosmetics counter, the plastic surgeon, the beauty specialist’.

In fact, through the strong impact of media images and a new body ideology, Japanese men and women are made to believe that they are somehow defective and in need of constant beauty work to remove hair, lift eyelids, whiten their skin, diet and undertake other such corrections to safeguard their beauty. This massive desire to match to presented images typically sends them to drugstores, aesthetic salons, and plastic surgery clinics to remedy their individual issues. Media-disseminated normalizing images (Bordo, 1993) tell women about new form of “defects” they were unaware of in past. Even the otherwise priggish Japanese government has come to acknowledge the power of the media (Miller, 2006). This massive desire to match to media presented images typically sends them straight to the drugstores, the aesthetic salons, and plastic

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<sup>12</sup> The campaign seems to be quite popular and effective for the brand, since it is running up today (November, 2016)

surgery clinics in order to remedy their individual issues. Media-disseminated normalising images (Bordo, 1993) tell women about new form of “defects” they were unaware of in past. Even the otherwise priggish Japanese government has come to acknowledge the power of the media (Miller, 2006).

A comment of a young Japanese lady to Nicole Mowbray’s article for 'The Guardian' demonstrates this urge for the ideal appearance:

‘I went on many sunbeds to stay *ganguro*’, says Tomoko Ishii, 22. ‘Being tanned was interesting - but now I want to be *bihaku*<sup>13</sup>. I use whitening products every day and total sunblock with lightening products. I don't mind how much I spend. Appearance means everything in Japan’ (Mowbray, 2004).

Kiyoka Wada is a professional weight loss expert, who has advised around 10,000 people over her career. In her interview to Peter Barakan for NHK World, she describes Japanese people as serious and conscientious:

They are very focused on numbers; they get wrapped up in specific numbers such as ideal weights and waist sizes. Then, as they strive to gradually cut down numbers like size and weight and start to get results, they get totally hooked. I think that as they lose weight, they are spurred further by the desire to lose more.

She adds that magazines and other beauty industry media dictate “ideal numbers” and the image of an ideal figure is based on Japanese idols, celebrities and models (NHK World, 2016), even though it is not a secret that most of the images in magazines today are retouched. Yet, the Japanese become convinced that this really represents the best size for them.

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<sup>13</sup>美白 (*bihaku*) is a Japanese commercial term that refers to beauty products with functions of skin whitening or brightening (Xinyi, 2014)

In this term, beauty can be viewed as a tool of social media, which is often sponsored by the beauty industry, and therefore it can be argued that it is not a form of a personal initiative. Bordo (1997, p. 37) describes such behaviour as a “pedagogy of defect”, when female consumers tend to learn that parts of their bodies are faulty and unacceptable, therefore they are dedicated to “fix” the flaws media have pointed to them.

### Chapter 3.1 – High Betting on the Appearance

Japanese people are known for their characteristic to be enthusiastic aesthetes. Their concept of beauty understanding is entirely unique as they seek it through the beauty’s imperfections and the beauty of aging. This paradigm of pursuance for beauty in traditional architecture, utensils and crafts, patterns, gardening and even lifestyle is originating from such conception as *wabi-sabi*, which is rooted in the ancient Japanese Shinto<sup>14</sup> religion. *Wabi-sabi* is often referred to as the major concept related to the Japanese aesthetics. This collocation was coined with a view to simplify the Japanese notions of beauty. Suzuki Daisetsu clarified that *wabi* is to be considered as the style of life devoted to the notions of the ascetic aesthetics, and *sabi* implies features of a thing, such as simplicity, archaic traits and, to some extent, lack of refinement (Suzuki & Jaffe, 2010). In a sort of way *wabi-sabi* concept reflects in such forms as for example *yaeba* or snaggle- teeth.

However, commonly Japanese view body aesthetics in a different way. Conversely, they seek for a refinement shape, youthfulness and efflorescence of the figure. According to the concept of *hattou shin*, ideally a person’s head should be one-

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<sup>14</sup> Shinto, (Jap. "way of the gods.") – The traditional religion in Japan. Based on the animistic beliefs of the ancient Japanese; objects of worship are many deities and spirits of the dead. Shinto has experienced in its development a significant influence of Buddhism.

eighth of the total height. The upper half of the body should be equivalent to the total length of three heads while the legs should be as long as 4 heads. This translates to a person having a small face and long legs, which are desirable in Japan (Japan Info, 2016).

For Japanese upcoming graduates, who are in the middle of the job seeking process there are many rules especially when it comes to appearance. Those rules apply for a specific dress code; hairstyle and even the way of applying makeup must be followed. The suit must be black, hairstyle should open up job seeker's face and the colour of the hair has to better be black or more natural brown tone; the truly interesting part is that makeup is required as a manner of etiquette. Young women should wear natural makeup, which is noticeable enough to give an impression that woman jobseeker is "a cheerful person". A patriarchal and traditional mentality of Japanese society is seen through this rule – as many Japanese consider it impolite for women not to wear makeup at work. In Japan the job-hunting process is very systemized and students have to secure a job before graduating from universities, otherwise they will be regarded as though they had dropped out of the system (Lys, 2014).

In *Unbearable Weight* it is noted that surgeries that people pass often assimilate ethnic and racial features to a more “white” norm. Author makes a rhetorical question, whether people of different cultures reshape their own nose to look more African or Jewish. Bringing up a historical fact that people who considered “too black or obviously Jewish” have been refused to access public places and even sometimes condemned to death (Bordo, 1993, pp. 25-35). Then, in her publishing *Twilight Zone*, author states that in Japan it is common for college graduate students, who are looking for a job, to surgically alter their eyes in order to appear more occidental, further explaining that more “western” appearance raises chances for a female job-seeker to get approved for

being more “edgy” (Bordo, 1997, p. 49). However, it may well be that Japanese women undertake such actions not to pursue a western-like appearance, but as a matter of fact they punt on an attractive physique in order to get hired. Studies have shown that attractive people are more likely to get hired (Little, Jones, & DeBruine, 2011), get promotions more quickly (Maestripieri, 2012), and are paid more than their less-attractive co-workers (Stanger, 2012). The London Guildhall study showed that overweight women are more likely to be unemployed and that those who are working earn on average 5 percent less than their trimmer peers (Lorenz, 2005). According to Daniel Hamermesh (2011), attractive people earn an average up to 5 percent more than people with rather average looks. According to Dr. Gordon Patzer, who has spent more than three decades studying and writing about physical attractiveness, human beings are hard-wired to respond more favorably to attractive people (Lorenz, 2005).

For the question in the conducted interview, “If you do not wear any makeup, do you think you can feel confident at the job interview? ”, one third of the participants stated that it would not bother them, however two thirds said that they would feel very uncomfortable and most likely unconfident. Out of the two thirds, half of the people pointed out that it would be simply rude to appear at the job interview not wearing makeup. As aforementioned, wearing makeup for the job interview is a manner of politeness that should be followed. The cosmetics industry companies, such as Shiseido are providing a guideline and seminars teaching what kind of makeup should be applied for a job interview. Mainly, it is for students who are doing job hunting. Since there are still many people, who are not into decorative makeup and simply do not want to use it, a sort of a society pressure can be observed. Yet most of the interview participants consider it as somewhat normal and something that is simply has to be done. Another

assumption is that the strong manipulation on the "appropriate makeup for the job interview" is imposed by the beauty industry itself.

It is important to keep in mind that the attainment of "beauty" symbolizes individual success, moral improvement, and self-transformation. For Japan's younger generation, self-control over the appetite is, in addition to an aesthetic issue, a moral problem that reflects the internalization of *gambaru*<sup>15</sup> values in Japanese society. Having an attractive appearance is definitely a major factor that benefits young Japanese people when it comes to being hired, promoted, and being a successful person in general. Companies and corporations tend to enjoy seeing handsome and beautiful representatives among their employees; therefore it pays to be attractive in the world of business.

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<sup>15</sup> The word *gambaru* is often translated to mean "doing one's best", but in practice, it means doing more than one's best.

## Chapter 4 – *Sekushii* is the New *Kawaii*? Or Modern Woman's identity through body aesthetics

Crazy Japanese TV game shows that became viral and spread all over YouTube helped to develop an opinion among the majority of non-Japanese viewers that Japanese television is absolutely insane and does not follow conventional ethical or cultural norms. Nevertheless, those TV shows are usually broadcast late at night or the very early hours. Even though the protagonists of those shows are often Japanese men, the main focus of attention tends to centre on the young Japanese female models featured on such programs, replete with large round eyes, long and slender legs, and voluptuous breasts. This is the sexual portrayal of women which is targeted to adult Japanese males, even though the general body type of the Japanese female body is quite the opposite to how they are depicted in the media. In reality, Japanese women have shorter legs than the portrayal as on television and a relatively plain, modest figure.

Cherry (1987, p. 2) notes, "Traditionally, a Japanese woman's appeal was said to reside in an anatomical part that most other nations ignore: the nape (*unaji*) of the neck. More than breasts, buttocks, or legs, the nape exuded sensuality." Although mostly thought of this as a pre-war preference, nape appreciation was still popular enough in the mid- 1980s that Cherry found a women's magazine article on nape beauties accompanied by photos of celebrity napes.

For the past three decades for the majority of Japanese women the urge of keeping a *kawaii* look was very important. Magazines with images of girls that looked rather naïve, powerlessness and childlike were flooding the market and continue to do so. Laura Miller suggests that Japan's new bust-consciousness (that is going on for the past decade) is somewhat of a rebellion against the cult of cuteness, which is still



revered by many Japanese men (p. 75). It is common for beauty culture to change. Within this change it provides an excellent example of the way cultural values and attitudes form and are formed by consumerism, as well as how rapidly and willingly they become defined as somewhat essential. According to Miller, a study of the Japanese beauty industry presents a good case for evaluating theories of globalization. In interpreting recent changes in beauty ideals, many critics see in these developments a straightforward process of Western domination (p. 3). The breast was never considered a sexualized part of woman's body in Japan as public breastfeeding was common; and, moreover, if to take a closer look to Japanese art of the aforementioned Heian (794-1185) and the Edo (1600-1868) period, it is observed that between female and male breasts there is not a big difference in size. One strong change due to Western influence is the sexualisation of breasts, a feature that used to be considered maternal. This evolution was accompanied by changes in clothing styles. In the deals of female attractiveness, creating a focus on parts of the female anatomy other than the breasts. While a kimono gives the female form a columnar look that deemphasizes the breasts and waist and draws attention to the neck, hips, and ankles (Miller, 2006, p. 78).

An individual may perceive his or her particular beauty work as self-defining and empowering, even though his or her choices are limited and moulded by his or her culture. For Japanese females the word "*sekushii*"<sup>16</sup> possibly does not carry the exact same meaning that it has for Western people, yet it includes such key words as 'independent' and 'not afraid to show yourself'. Marketers of breast products and aesthetic procedures exploit the sense of independence and power available to women through body transformation, using such slogans in advertisements, "Goodbye to the old me – at the Bust Clinic I'll get confidence" (Miller, 2006, p. 75)

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<sup>16</sup> Japanese version of English word "sexy"

Throughout the interview many young women who have answered the questionnaire pointed out that “being sexy” does not always refer to person’s appearance in Japanese mind set, as it is also statement of inner independency. In a patriarchal Japanese society, those women who achieve acknowledgment and popularity are usually considered to be sexy.

A shift from a *kawaii* look to a more *sekushii* one is also seen in current make-up trends. A new fad is called ‘Hangover makeup’. This vogue is the latest make-up trend sweeping the country. It is achieved by applying blush under the eyes and having 'wet-look' hair. The red around the eyes gives the impression of being unwell and in need of looking after, while the wet-look hair provides a contrasting sexy feel (Grounsell, 2015). This make-up movement is popular with teenagers and young women in their twenties.

A popular new movement in Japan, which aims to help ‘empower’ women, is by encouraging them to wear high heels (Demetriou, 2016). Around the world high-heels are considered to make legs appear to be slender and defined. In Western society in particular, high-heels are seen as an inherent part of sexual appeal. In Japan, high-heels seem to take the role of being an 'empowering tool' to boost their confidence in the society. This highly criticised theory is helping women to embrace feeling more confident in order to resist the stereotypical lifestyle of Japanese woman (short employment, followed by maternity leave), and to be confident and courageous enough to occupy higher positions in companies. A psychological factor plays a role when, for instance, a woman is riding a train and thanks to her heels and newly boosted height she is able to look down on a nearby standing salaryman<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> A white-collar office worker

Typically in Japan, dieting or aesthetics therapy ads and beauty products commercials rarely show the admiration of males. Such approach is strengthening an idea that there is something far more beyond to simply achieve the perfection in order to attract men (Miller, 2006). The attempts of females to resist from the stereotypical character of domestic goddess and conscientious feeder might be expressed through, for example, diet – as this process often requires self-focusing and individual power. Those might be the motives, which beauty industries want to sell to the consumer.

One of the questions in the interview was to analyse the views on the notions of various forms of body aesthetics. A particular question in the interview asked the responder "In your opinion, which of those celebrities has the most ideal appearance?" The following answers were provided; Nozomi Sasaki, Ai Tominaga, Koda Kumi, Naomi Watanabe, Rola, and Scarlett Johansson.



Figure G. From left to right: Nozomi Sasaki, Ai Tominaga, Koda Kumi, Naomi Watanabe, Rola and Scarlett Johansson. (images from the questionnaire)

The choice of those specific talents and celebrities carried a certain meaning, since each one of them depicted a certain beauty appearance. The most popular answer was Rola, a famous Japanese fashion model and TV personality. She is of Bengali, Japanese, and Russian descent. With her candid, bubbly and kawaii personality, tanned skin, tall height and light pink blonde hair, she is the absolute polarity of Nozomi Sasaki – a traditional beauty with classic Japanese light skin, and dark hair. The popular actress

Nozomi Sasaki was the second most popular celebrity. When people pointed out Rola and Nozomi I also asked them, which of these women was considered to be 'sexy' and which was '*kawaii*'. The first example, sexy, was given to Rola, while the *kawaii* label was linked to Nozomi. In most cases women were choosing Rola, and that might show that her appearance is appealing to them and perhaps displays an unintentional desire to correspond with current societal pressure. However, before the most recent two decades, practically almost all lingerie advertisements and revealing aesthetic procedure advertisements only featured Western models as the image of Japanese women was considered to be pure and innocent (Miller, 2006). Now it has changed though and more Japanese models appear in such advertisements. Conversely, men preferred the classical beauty of Nozomi Sasaki, as she is the quintessential depiction of traditional beauty. All of the women featured in the questionnaire have a distinctive appearance. Sasaki Nozomi is *kawaii* and has white skin. Tominaga Ai has an edgy, androgynous face. Koda Kumi has deeply tanned skin, more close to the style of *ganguro*. Naomi Watanabe has a curvy body shape (plus size model); Rola is considered to be a sex symbol. Since Scarlett Johansson is a foreign woman the reason for her inclusion was that her appearance acts as an opposite to the traditional Japanese look. Rola is a new type of personality on Japanese television. She is independent, humorous, beautiful, sexy, and looks much different from classical portrayals of Japanese beauty. This new kind of character seems to be appealing to the vast majority of young Japanese women today. Not only do they appreciate her alluring appearance, more importantly they value her confident and independent character, her great sense of humour, and the fact that she is unafraid to express her opinions and thoughts. It seems highly possible that young Japanese women have warmed to this new notion of what means truly to be a modern woman in Japan.

## Conclusion

*Il faut souffrir pour être belle (Beauty requires sacrifice)*

– Famous French aphorism.

This research paper provides a description and analysis of contemporary Japanese body aesthetics as it developed during the 2000s to mid-2010s. Although the study focuses mainly on Japanese women, men's body aesthetics are also mentioned. The Japanese beauty ideal examined in this paper can be considered empowering – by recognizing women's freedom of choice in consumption activities, and as studies show – it also points out the relation between self-esteem and appearance. The second boosts up the confidence, while raising chances to get recognized by third parties such as potential employers. This motivates women to put a lot of time on a rigorous skin-care regime, including beauty therapies, dieting and purchasing beauty products. The typical high cost of such beautification methods does not deter them. Moreover, Japanese tend to have a positive image of advertisements, commercials, show business programs and etc., often following their favorite idols and celebrities. This positively benefits the beauty industry to strongly impact the current beauty trends and manipulate body aesthetics, as these personalities are held up as trendsetters in regards to beauty and body aesthetics. Lastly, in the past three decades, a naïve and childlike appearance called *kawaii* has been what young women have generally pursued. Though it is still popular, it is however getting slightly traded out for a more adult, sexy and confident beauty ideal.

Japanese people are highly conscious of its traditions. Thanks to the strength of this collective mindset traditional norms still greatly influence what is deemed to be attractive in Japanese society. With respect to beauty standards, criteria such as having

fair skin continue to be important in today's world. During the Heian period (794-1185) and the Edo period (1600-1868) women were highly beauty conscious. They focused not only on their inner beauty but also their external appearance played an important role in their life. Beauty was highly praised in those distinct periods, evident in the traditions of make-up and skin care routines in those times. The original notions of Japanese beauty standards were born in those eras. From what has been explored throughout this study it would suggest that contemporary body aesthetics are connected with the cultural background and the mentality of Japanese people, rather than are influenced by Western cultures.

The consumption of expensive beauty products, various skin-care treatments, and in some cases even plastic surgery operations exhibit how important appearance is for the Japanese. The power of beauty industry is its quality of attainability, but it is attainable only through consumption of products, services and ideology. A highly promoted trend and a key notion of contemporary body aesthetics and femininity is an excessive slimness (Miller, 2006). Dieting fads became so popular in Japan, that during the late 1980's Japanese have invented nutrient rich yet calorie low "functional food" (Bloise, 2014). Even though, Japanese are urging to constantly diet, they hold to an opinion that good health does not come from just losing weight but from improving one's habits: eating, exercise and lifestyle. There is more focus on overall health (NHK World, 2016).

It is natural, that different nations and countries have different ideas of body aesthetics and such factor as globalization might help people to tolerate each other's visions of beauty. Globalisation has a strong impact on many cultures, yet some of today's biggest trend such as curvy feminine figure of body aesthetics that spread around the world, though in Japan the acceptance is much slower and harder, simply

because genetically it is not likeable for most of Japanese to have such type of figure, however gradually it starts to appear more and more due to the influence of first plus-size magazine, idol group, and several shops.

Under those circumstances, today the purpose to enhance appearance has expanded and became a part of self-improvement and achievement of success. Among young Japanese women, it is also conceivable that the term “sexy” or as they say “*sekushii*” also carries a meaning of self-confidence and often does not impersonate the westernised meaning. With the appearance of a sexually mature woman it helps to rebel the patriarchal mentality and showcase the new notion of modern woman. The survey composed for the thesis that questioned young Japanese people helped to prove this statement. Will this new notion intrench oneself as it did the *kawaii* cult or it is just a contemporary fad? The future is to show.

That is to say, the allure to pursuit the “ideal” is also motivated by the symbolic expression of socially sanctioned self-improvement.

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## Appendix 1

### Questionnaire on the Japanese Body Beauty Standards

I decided to investigate the appearance of the Japanese female beauty standards. Since I came to Japan, I became interested in the differences between the European and Japanese body beauty representation. In Japan, when you see advertising in the train, a thin model with pale skin color is a popular image to use, whilst if to compare what is popular in Europe, then body shape of women is often body positive or curvy as well skin is often tanned.

From my experience working part-time at a drugstore, I observed that many Japanese women spend a lot of time and money on expensive cosmetics as well as aesthetic salons.

According to the researcher Laura Miller of the University of California, it looks that the beauty industry technology and new beauty standards are influencing a lot Japanese woman.

For the past 30 years, beauty industry has an impact on the beauty standard for young Japanese women. Under the pressure of society Japanese women tend to use cosmetics in order to become gain more confidence.

For the sake of the investigation I would like hear answers from Japanese on the next seven questions.

- 1) What is your sex?  
1. Female 2. Male
- 2) How old are you?  
1. Under 20 years old 2. 21-30 3. 31-40 4. 41-50 5. 51-60 6. 61+
- 3) When did you started to use cosmetics?
- 4) What kind of cosmetics do you usually buy?  
For example: Sun Protection Cream, Whitening Cream, Powder, Mascara and etc.
- 5) If you do not wear any makeup, do you think you can be confident at the job interview?
- 6) In your opinion, which of those celebrities has the most ideal appearance?



1) Sasaki Nozomi; 2) Tominaga Ai; 3) Kumi Koda; 4) Naomi Watanabe; 5) ROLA; 6) Scarlett J.

- 7) What would you like to «fix» in your appearance?
  1. To have a whiter skin
  2. To change the body shape
  3. To change the hair colour
  4. Double eyelids
  5. Snaggletooth
  6. Nothing

## Appendix 2

### The Analysis of Replies to the Questionnaire on Japanese Beauty Standards By Ksenia Vassiljeva

Based on the above hypothesis in the Questionnaire, in May 2016, first year to forth year college students at the International Christian University were interviewed, as well as several graduated students and colleagues from the Ainz and Tulpe cosmetic shop. However, some participants were reached throughout Facebook, but the majority were live spoken on the topics of "Japanese Beauty Standards". The majority of participants were females and the total quantity was 48 people among whom, there were 9 male participants and 39 female participants. 90% of the participants were in the age between 21 to 30 years old.

"When did you start to use cosmetics?" The most common answer was 17 years old. The average of the whole of the respondents was given as around 15.9 years old.

"What kind of cosmetics do you usually buy?" Almost every participant stated that they buy sun protection lotions and hydrating pack masks (which often contain a whitening effect). As to the decorative cosmetics most popular items were blush and eyeliner.

"If you do not wear any makeup, do you think you can be confident at the job interview?" One third of the participants stated that it would not bother them, however two thirds said that they would feel very uncomfortable and most likely unconfident. Out of the two thirds, half of the people pointed out that it would be simply rude to appear at the job interview not wearing makeup and wearing makeup for the job interview is a manner that should be followed. In fact, the cosmetics industry companies, such as Shiseido are providing a guideline what kind of makeup should be applied for a job interview. Mainly, it is for students who are doing job hunting. Since there are still many people, who are not into decorative makeup and simply do not want to use it, we can observe a sort of a society pressure. However Japanese young people consider it as somewhat normal and something that is simply has to be done. Another assumption is that the strong manipulation on the "appropriate makeup for the job interview" is imposed by the beauty industry itself.

"What would you like to «fix» in your appearance?" The vast majority, a bit more than two thirds of the participants answered that they would wish to change their figures. However, there were 22 people who wished to become more muscular and toned, have more defined figure and be thinner. Others stated that they wished to lose weight. Since people could choose several answers to this question, around one third of the people chose to whiten their skin.

Finally, "In your opinion, which of those celebrities has the most ideal appearance?" Nozomi Sasaki, Ai Tominaga, Koda Kumi, Naomi Watanabe, Rola and Scarlett Johansson. The choice of those specific talents and celebrities carried a certain meaning, since each one of them depicted a certain beauty appearance. Most popular answer was Rola – a Japanese fashion model and TV personality. She is of Bengali, Japanese and Russian descent. With her candid, bubbly and kawaii personality, tanned skin, tall height and blondish hair, she is an absolute polarity to Nozomi Sasaki, a classical Japanese light skin dark hair beauty. Nozomi Sasaki – a popular actress was the second most popular celebrity. When people pointed out Rola and Nozomi I also asked them, who was considered to be "sexy" and who "kawaii". The first was referred to Rola, while second to Nozomi.

All of the women have a distinctive appearance. Sasaki Nozomi is kawaii and has a

white skin. Tominaga Ai has an edgy androgynous face. Koda Kumi has tanned skin, more close to ganguro. Naomi Watanabe has a curvy body shape. Rola is considered to be sexy. Since Scarlett Johansson is a foreign person, the key meaning was that her appearance is different from Japanese. Rola is a new type of personality on the Japanese television, she is independent, humorous, beautiful, sexy and looks different from a classical Japanese beauty. This kind of character seems to be alluring to the vast majority of young Japanese women. Should be mentioned that most of the men picked Sasaki Nozomi as their “ideal”. This selection unintentionally points out that Japanese men are more used to the custom kawaii appearance and behavior of women. Among young Japanese women, it is also conceivable that the term sexy also carries a meaning of self-confidence. For the past 30 years, Japanese popular culture made the kawaii trend a part of daily life of millions of people. The new trend of having a more sexy appearance is recently gaining more popularity. Even though Japanese imply their own meaning to this term.