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Fashion Subcultures in Japan

A multilayered history of street fashion in Japan

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Abstract

This thesis discusses the history of the street fashion styles and its accompanying cultures that are to be found on the streets of Japan, focusing on the two most well-known places in Tokyo, namely *Harajuku* and *Shibuya*, as well as examining if the economic turmoil in Japan in the 1990s had any effect on the Japanese street fashion. The thesis also discusses youth cultures, not only those in Japan, but also in North-America, Europe, and elsewhere in the world; as well as discussing the theories that exist on the relation of fashion and economy of the Western world, namely in North-America and Europe.

The purpose of this thesis is to discuss the possible causes of why and how the Japanese street fashion scene came to be into what it is known for today: colorful, demiurgic, and most of all, seemingly outlandish to the viewer; whilst using Japanese society and culture as a reference. Moreover, the history of certain street fashion styles of Tokyo is to be examined in this thesis.

The first chapter examines and discusses youth and subcultures in the world, mentioning few examples of the various subcultures that existed, as well as introducing the Japanese school uniforms and the culture behind them. The second chapter addresses how both fashion and economy influence each other, and how the fashion in Japan was before its economic crisis in 1991. The third chapter discusses how the street fashion in Japan gained attention from around the globe and its spread on the internet, and finally the fourth chapter addresses the Japanese street fashion as it is in the present-day at the time when this thesis is written.

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Introduction

When walking down the shopping streets of Tokyo, many garishly clad people emerge before your eyes. Wherever you look, this unusual fashion is to be seen. Young people in particular, dress in many different styles, in a fashion that is not always considered a mainstream fashion. *Harajuku* is the most notable example of the street fashion in Japan. It is most known for the colorful, lively and creative fashion that has emerged in Japan through the years.

How is it that these people dress in all those creative fashions. Why is the street fashion in Japan the way it is now? Why is there so much creativity on the streets of Harajuku, and what may have happened in the past that sparked the creativity of the Japanese youth to dress in this fashion?

I discovered *Harajuku* fashion through the internet. I first saw pictures of people in *cosplay* (コスプレ - *kosupure*, a *wasei-eigo*¹ term, a portmanteau of the English words ‘costume’ and ‘play’), people in costumes dressing up as characters from *anime* (アニメ - Japanese cartoons/animation), *manga* (漫画 - Japanese comics) and video games. Although I wasn’t very interested in the idea of dressing up as a particular character from a video game or a cartoon I liked for fun, yet I was still intrigued by the idea of dressing up in clothes that weren't necessarily considered a day-to-day outfit by society. Moreover, among the *cosplay* pictures, there were photos of people in different kind of fashion, not only *cosplay*, but their own, unique style. Later, in late 2006, I discovered Lolita fashion, which is, in short, a modernized version of the clothes that

1 *Wasei-eigo* (和製英語), or 'English (words) made in Japan', are expressions not used by English speakers. Examples include: *cooler* (*kuuraa*, クーラー) for air conditioner, *all back* (*ooru bakku*, オールバック) for swept back hair, and *one piece* (*wan piisu*, ワンピース) for a woman's dress.

were worn by European royals in 1600s-1800s. The cuteness and elegance of the girls dressed in Lolita inspired me in part to visit Japan. The clothes of Lolita fashion was what I had always wanted to wear. Soon after discovering Lolita fashion, I started researching the other styles *Harajuku* had to offer and have become quite a Japanese street fashion enthusiast.

In this thesis it is my intention to dwell into how the street fashion of Japan, especially in *Harajuku* and *Shibuya*, developed in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and even earlier, and how it has changed through the years into what it is today. Looking at the history of the fashion and subcultures of *Gyaru*, *Lolita*, and other fashion and/or style oriented subcultures of Tokyo all of which will be explained in subsequent chapters, it is noticeable that those subcultures have roots in the late-1970s and 1980s, and I would argue that their 'golden' years were in the 1990s and early 2000s. Thus the question arises whether there is a correlation between the street fashion boom in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and the often referred to 'lost decade' in Japan following the economic crash in 1990.

The evolution of the street fashion in Japan may have started in the 1970s, when *Harajuku* was closed from vehicle traffic on Sundays, and Harajuku became *hoko ten* (Aoki, 2001, p. 1), in other words, a haven for pedestrians for meeting up and be a part of the street culture that was blooming in *Harajuku* during that time, without the Thus, on Sundays, while most students in Tokyo and neighboring places had time off from school, and when there was enough space for people to gather around and show themselves, a great opportunity for dressing up and showing one's sense of style commenced.

An introduction to youth cultures in the world.

Youths of any culture and time have often been viewed as irresponsible and hedonistic (Calluori, 1985), even as narcissists by some people (Twenge, Campell, 2009), and may as well be described as “being “inconsiderate”, “self-centered”, and “spoiled”” by the elders of their society (Mathews, White, 2006, p. 1), who lack of respect towards older/preceding generations. However, this opinion is not new, but rather people have had this opinion of teenagers for generations.

The counts of the indictment are luxury, bad manners, contempt for authority, disrespect to elders, and a love for chatter in place of exercise.

Children began to be the tyrants, not the slaves, of their households. They no longer rose from their seats when an elder entered the room; they contradicted their parents, chattered before company, gobbled up the dainties at table, and committed various offences against Hellenic tastes, such as crossing their legs. They tyrannised over the paidagogoi and schoolmasters. (quoted from Quote Investigator, 2010)

This quote, which has been attributed to ancient philosophers Socrates or Plato, but quite likely did not appear in print until in 1907, and was actually written by a student Kenneth John Freeman, in which “he was presenting his own summary of the complaints directed against young people in ancient times.” Still shows governing attitudes of adult towards teenagers quite well. (Quote Investigator, 2010).

People frequently use clothing as a conscious tool for communication, to demonstrate association, to which group within society they belong to. Young people in particular make use of this mechanism. The teenage years are formative and as such involving experimentation and a level of pushing at perceived boundaries, they dress up to appease specific groups they want to belong to or to show distance from others. For

example, a high school student in the USA might want to be part of the perceived cool group in their school, so the student may start to dress in similar clothes, even in the same brand as the desirable group, act in a similar manner, listen to the same music, and perhaps even commit crimes in order to fit in the group.

As adults, the majority of people dress in order to fit in to society, choosing clothes and attitudes that reflect their general standing in society, their work environment and the image they want to convey as one of adhering to the rules and adaptation. However, there are those who consciously challenge the standard dress code of society, who decide to flaunt their views and do not dress to fit in their place in their society.

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, a subculture is “an ethnic, regional, economic, or social group exhibiting characteristics patterns of behavior sufficient to distinguish it from others within an embracing culture or society”

(Subcultures, n.d).

Subcultures may revolve around one or more specific things suchlike as music, political inclination, fashion, certain TV shows or movies, lifestyle or anything that is based on interests, which may or may not be considered to be on the fringe of society, in which more than one person have in common and enjoy together.

Multitudes of subcultures exists, and the most notable ones are also the ones that were either clamorous, or were part of a movement that influenced society in later years, such as the punk movement and the hippies of the 1960s and 1970s, which both will be explained shortly in this chapter.

Most subcultures of the 20th century in North-America and Europe, that are worth examining in this thesis, had an influence on society and culture , e.g. on politics,

fashion, and on people's lifestyle during the height of each subculture's lifetime. One of the most influential and well-known subculture in postwar USA were possibly the *hippies* of the 1960s-1970s. With their beginnings in mid-1960s, and immense popularity achieved during Woodstock, a festival of music and art in 1969, the hippies protested the Vietnam war in the 1960s, and war in general, and demanded peace among humans, while promoting love and pacifism through slogans such as 'make love, not war'. (Hippie, n.d.) A popular although clichéd appearance of the hippies is that they were unhygienic, used hallucinogenic drugs for recreational purpose, and dressed in clothing that was considered unconventional in 1960s and 1970s.

Another subculture that has also garnered interest from people all around the world and has been scrutinized by media in N-America and Europe, was the punk movement, that surfaced in the 1970s, with the United Kingdom a “the hotbed of the new youth movement” (punk, n.d.) and to a certain extent, influenced people around the world to emulate the movement. The punks were an ideologically political force and an inspiration for fashion designers and style-conscious people, but were first and foremost a musical movement, a genre within the rock music style. Punk fashion is best characterized by their use of collars, ripped clothes, and their multi-colored hair in elaborate hairstyles, such as mohawks.

Subcultures, such as the ones mentioned before in this thesis, often use fashion as a way to differentiate themselves from the society, e.g. the people in the punk movement used their clothing style to show that they do not belong to the perceived 'normal' society. Yet, their fashion style became a fashionable style at the turn of the 21st century, and the harsh, anti-society message in the sharp fashion was lost to the people,

and worn by the society without implying any political or subcultural message with the punk-inspired fashion items. This effect, of fashion from a subculture becoming a mainstream, desired/fashionable item/clothing, is part of the 'bubble-up' theory of fashion, which is, according to Polhemus (n.d), “[Street] styles which start life on the street corner have a way of ending up on the backs of top models on the world’s most prestigious fashion catwalks.”

Subcultures and fitting in in Japanese society.

Schools in Japan have strict rules on one's appearance, for instance, the length of one's fingernails and hair should be at a required length, school uniform must be worn, and presenting one's individuality is discouraged, considering it is thought that doing so provokes students to protest their teachers, indulging in criminal behavior suchlike the use of stimulants, and breaking the school's rules (Nemoto, 1999, p. 74). Through Confucian thought, the education system takes the parents' place of teaching morals through school.

From elementary school and until the graduation of one's high school, students in Japan wear uniforms that were designed as the school's trademark, and some students flaunt their uniforms by wearing it when they are not attending school. On occasion students even choose schools they wish to advance into by how desirable the students' uniforms wear at a particular school. (Masangkay, 2004) Moreover, some students who attend schools that are lax in their dress code, even as far as having no official student uniforms, wear items, even the whole uniform, that are from popular schools. There are even fake school uniforms to be bought, or *nanchatte seifuku* (なんちゃって制服), which students, and even adults who have already graduated from high school, wear when they are not at school or work.

Although the strict dress codes in schools are supposed to discourage students from spending time and money on fashionable items, it also “has a negative effect on the development of students' independent spirit.” (Nemoto, 1999, p. 74). Any sign of modification on the uniform is frowned upon, and students who do so are seen as rebellious and are castigated by their teachers (Nemoto, 1999, p. 75).

School uniforms, in particular girls' school uniforms, have been fetishized and sexualized by Japanese culture, to the point of becoming a popular concept in the Japanese sex industry, and with schoolgirls in high school, junior high school, even as young as girls in elementary schools, participating in 'casual' prostitution, known as *enjo kosai* (援助交際), or 'compensated dating', in which older men seek company with teenage girls, and pay for their company with money and/or luxury items (Spry, 2008, p. 221).

There is a recurrent theme among pop culture articles discussing Japanese culture, with titles suchlike “6 Japanese Subcultures That Are Insane (Even for Japan)” (Shakespeare, 2010) and “Weird things about Japan” (Telegraph, n.d.), listing the seemingly curious paraphernalia about Japanese culture, often giving the wrong impression of what Japanese culture is in reality. A recurring theme of particular relevance to the current thesis that does appear in those kind of articles is the fashion; pictures of youth from a certain subculture wearing idiosyncratic clothing, giving its readers the semblance that Japanese culture is a country with an outlandish flair.

Abundance of subcultures exist in Japan, some seem more outrageous than other, e.g. people in *cosplay*, to mention but a few, but *cosplay* is as was described in the introduction of the act of dressing up as specific characters from *anime* and *manga*.. An adequate number of Japanese subcultures have a specific district within Tokyo as their anchor place, and are a prime attraction at their respective locations for tourists and local pedestrians alike.

Tokyo, a metropolitan city in Japan, is comprised of many hubs of cities, wards

and villages, such as *Shinjuku*, the main retail and entertainment district, *Akihabara*, which is overflowing with *anime* and *manga* related goods, also considered the main hub for the *otaku* (オタク), a subculture of geeks, often of *anime* and *manga*, usually male, who are often looked down upon by Japanese society for being obsessed; and *Ikebukuro*, which is, like *Akihabara*, a district full of *anime* and *manga* paraphernalia, catering to the female version of the *otaku*, the *fujoshi* (腐女子 – literally meaning 'rotten girl'), females who enjoy *anime* and *manga*, *cosplay*, as well as *yaoi*, often pornographic depictions of homosexual relationships between men, usually in the form of *manga* and *anime*. *Shibuya*, a hub of various entertainment and fashion, as well as the *gyaru* subculture, which will be further explained later in this thesis, and *Harajuku*, an influential location for the distinctive street fashions, which few number of them will be examined later in this thesis.

Shibuya, along with *Harajuku*, is known for the plentiful youth culture, that has gained attention, both internationally and domestically alike. The youth cultures of both *Shibuya* and *Harajuku*, will be covered in this thesis.

During the American occupation of Japan following the Second World War, *Washington Heights* was constructed in *Harajuku*, used as a base for the American army in Tokyo (Godoy, Vartanian, 2007, p. 22). Young people who were interested about American fashion visited *Washington Heights* in *Harajuku* to witness the foreign culture (FASHION JAPAN: Harajuku Fashion. n.d.). Consequently, *Harajuku* became a hub for Japanese youngsters for American products, for instance clothing and accessories, and with more young people frequenting to *Harajuku* to gather information

on what is in vogue in the American fashion, the place became a center for a growing youth culture. From 1977-1998, a part of the main shopping street of *Harajuku*, *Omotesandou*, was a traffic free zone on Sundays, and thus became a 'heaven for pedestrians', or *hokosha tengoku* (矛者天国) in its original language, shortened to *hoko ten* (Groom, 2011, p. 190). During the *hoko ten* era, a plethora of people visited *Harajuku*, often in various clothing styles, and among them, street performers showed up, most notably a group dressed in Rockabilly fashion who danced to tunes of classic rock music in *Yoyogi* park. 'Rockabilly' was originally a rock music genre, with prominent figures such as Elvis Presley. Men dressing in the rockabilly style often have greased hair made famous by musician Elvis Presley and the character Danny Zuko from the movie *Grease* (1978).

Among the street performers showing up in *Harajuku*, another dancing group that is worth looking into within this chapter, is the *Takenoko-zoku*, or 'Baby Bamboo Shoots Tribe' (Groom, 2011, p. 190), a group of teenagers that amassed together on Sundays to dance to tunes in unison. The *Takenoko-zoku* acquired that name from a shop they shopped at, named *Takenoko*, and as of the year 2015, the shop is still around in *Takeshita* street in *Harajuku*. The *Takenoko-zoku* drew copious amount of attention to everyone who visited *Harajuku*. Videos from the time showing those people dancing in groups on the crowded streets were what identified the *Takenoko-zoku* in terms of looks, brightly colored, clothes that were made with shiny fabric, cheap plastic accessories such as whistles, fake-pearl necklaces, bracelets, kung-fu shoes, and stuffed animals fastened to their outfits (Groom, 2011, p. 191).

Seeing the cultural importance of *Harajuku*, the next chapter will further delve

into the subcultures of both *Harajuku* and *Shibuya*, examining the history of few examples of the different street fashions of those places, and discussing the meaning they have on Japanese society and culture.

The cute rebels of *Harajuku* and *Shibuya*.

Seeing the importance of the fashions presented in both *Harajuku* and *Shibuya*, this chapter will seek to introduce and examine a few examples of the various street fashion style present.

For the purpose of clarification, here the fashion styles and subcultures of *Harajuku* and *Shibuya* will be grouped into two main categories: **cuties** and **rebels**. Although street fashion in general may be seen as one form of rebellion against society (as being a part of a subculture), thus the street fashion styles of *Tokyo* could all be grouped into the rebel category of this thesis, however, within this thesis, the cuties are the ones that were 'created' (or at least encouraged) by magazines and people that had power over deciding or influencing what other people would wear, such as celebrities and had a financial gain to consider; and the rebels are the ones that were created by the (young) people who actively rebelled against both traditional and/or popular beauty standards of Japanese society.

There are a vast of fashion styles and subcultures that either originated from or reached great popularity on the streets of Tokyo, but for the purpose of clarification this thesis will only address a few of them, seeing trying to represent all of them would mean the entirety of the thesis would just a listing. The fashion styles that will be discussed in depth are: the *Gyaru* subculture, along with its sub-styles; as well as Lolita fashion, Visual *kei*, *Mori Girl*, *Dolly kei*, *Decora*, and *Fairy kei*, to mention but a few.

The delinquents of Japan in the 1970s-2000s.

One way for the students at school to show society that they were distinguishable and autonomous from society, was to modify their school uniform in any way that might have been deemed unacceptable by their school, e.g. girls would roll up their skirt so it would appear as if they are wearing miniskirts, shirts could be untucked or sleeves could be worn rolled up. Seeing as school rules clearly forbade the coloring or bleaching of student's hair in the 1980s and the 1990s, one way for the students to rebel was to break their school's rules by dyeing their hair in lighter colors, thus showing a visual representation of their youth delinquency. In the 1970s and the 1980s, girl delinquents, known as *Sukeban*, had the length of their skirts longer than the normal length of the usual Japanese school girl uniform, often down to their ankles, as an antithesis to the *kawaii* culture that was becoming prevalent in Japan at the time (1970s-1980s) and as the contradiction of the short skirts, which were part of the cuteness and innocence that had become in vogue among students in Japanese junior high and high schools at the time.

The *Sukeban* were a part of a bigger subculture within Japan, the *Yankii*. The *Yankiis* are an infamous youth subculture of perceived delinquents in Japan, known for getting into fights, committing petty crimes, and damaging properties, such as smashing windows in their school. They may have their hair dyed blonde, and would often perm their hair (Shoji, 2002). Oftentimes they would modify their school uniform to fit their gang's dress code, and they often dress in a long coat, with emblems of their group. The stereotypical *Yankii* squats down, smokes cigarettes, is in a violent gang and fights *Yankiis* from other gangs, reminiscent of the rockers of 1950s America and United

Kingdom.

The delinquents of Japan came in number of varieties, some types of groups more famous than the other, sometimes gaining attention from people outside Japan. One particular movement of girls (and boys as well) in junior high and high schools (12-17 years of age) in Japan garnered a nation-wide, then later world-wide, attention and popularity. The *Kogals* (コギャル, *kogyaru*), originally were girls from rich families objecting to Japanese traditional culture and beauty standard and/or the schools' principle of the acceptable way of abiding the rules of one's appearance (Marx, 2012). The *kogals* are one facet of a larger subculture among the Japanese youth, the *Gyarus* which will now be discussed.

***Gyaru* (ギャル)**

Gyaru (ギャル), a *wasei-eigo*² term from the English word *gal*, which has become a definition of young women who “[dye their hair] anywhere between chestnut and deep blond, relatively sexy clothing, an embrace of youth, chronic shopping in Shibuya 109, and a generally “wild” attitude.” (Marx, 2012). One of the leading component features of *Gyaru* fashion is the make-up, generally the eye make-up, and the hair that has been bleached, essentially blond, and the clothes also play a part of each sub-styles of *Gyaru*. The main element within the *Gyaru* subculture, aside from the fashion, is to have fun, and spend time with their *Gyaru-sa*, or 'Gyaru circle', a group of *Gyarus*.

Gyaru is, in an essence, protests the feminine beauty standard that was favored

2 *Wasei-eigo* (和製英語), or 'English (words) made in Japan', are expressions not used by English speakers. Examples include: *cooler* (*kuuraa*, クーラー) for air conditioner, *all back* (*ooru bakku*, オールバック) for swept back hair, and *one piece* (*wan piisu*, ワンピース) for a woman's dress.

in Japan up until the 1990s, which was white skin, dark/black hair, and by appearing and acting as a modest and a demure woman. The girls who were part of the *Gyaru* subculture went the opposite way, with their tanned skins, bleached blonde hair, possibly with colorful hair extensions, and their clothes, known for being attention grabbing, both because it's often revealing, colorful and even unusual from the normal, mainstream clothes people who don't frequent to *Harajuku* and the neighboring shopping streets in Tokyo.

The *Gyaru* culture was further established in mid- to late-1990s. A magazine called *egg* (with a lower-case *e*) was first published in 1995, and one of its editor, *Yasumasu Yonehara*, was the one who first brought the *Gyaru* subculture to the public eye through the magazine. *Gyaru* who were still in high school, or *Kogal*, as they were called, were one of the main features of the magazine, and became a popular go-to magazine for young girls who were looking for inspiration and information on how to be a *Gyaru*. Although *egg* was originally intended to be a pin-up rag for men, nevertheless it became some sort of a style bible for *Kogals* and young *Gyarus*. (Ashcraft, Ueda, 2010). Yet, when *egg* became more and more popular among the young *Gyarus*, the focus of having one's own style fell out of favor with the editors of the magazine, instead becoming a guide for on 'how to become a *Gyaru*' kind of magazine, and with these changes, *Yonehara* left the magazine (Yonehara, 2014) when it started encouraging followers of *Gyaru* fashion to dress, tan, and apply more extreme make-up, leading up to the creation of *Ganguro* fashion style which rose in popularity at the turn of the 21st century (Ashcraft, Ueda, 2010).

Ganguro, meaning 'black face' in Japanese, were the second-extreme version of

Gyaru, with darker tan, heavier make-up, and their clothing was even more colorful. The reputation of the *Ganguro* girls were not overtly positive, as they were considered dirty and ridiculed for not washing themselves to persevere their tan and make-up, a big taboo in Japan's cleanliness obsessed culture. They were also thought of as 'stupid' and 'ugly', 'primitive', 'animalistic', as well as 'dimwitted young creatures' by Japanese media (Kinsella, 2005, p. 145-146).

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, *Ganguro* had become one of the most popular style within the *Gyaru* subculture in Japan. Girls who dressed up in *Ganguro* had dark tan, white eyeshadow, black eyeliner, white lips, and often a white line down their nose, to make it appear thinner and longer. In the early- to mid-2000s, *Yamanba* took over *Ganguro*. *Yamanba* is a more extreme version of *Ganguro*, bigger, whiter eyeshadow which extended down their cheeks, much darker tan, and much bigger and lighter hair than the *Ganguros* had, even with brightly colored streaks. *Manba*, slightly less extreme as *Yamanba*, yet more extreme than *Ganguro*.

In the latter half of the 2000s, a new style within the *Gyaru* subculture emerged, *Hime Gyaru*. *Hime Gyaru* emphasized on looking like a real life princess. Unlike the preceding *Gyaru* styles (*Ganguro*, *Yamanba*, *Manba* and more) the *Hime Gyaru* had a paler skin than most *Gyarus*, and, compared to the predecessors of *Gyaru*, looked a bit more modest than the other *Gyarus*.

In the mid- to late 2000s, with the appearance of a new magazine, *Koakuma Ageha*, *Age-jo* (*Ageha* woman) emerged. *Age-jo* was a bit more grown-up and sexier style of *Gyaru*, and has been associated with *Kyabakura* (cabaret club) girls, or hostesses: girls who work at a club or a bar where they serve salarymen (Japanese

businessmen) who come to see and be served by beautiful, young girls, and chat with them, sometimes linked with prostitution.

It is almost impossible to go over the history of Japanese street fashion and subcultures, without mentioning the *loose socks* that took Japanese youth fashion like a storm in from the 1990s onward. Loose socks are socks that are long - could reach up to a person's thighs if one wishes so, yet are pushed down to the wearer's shin, and are usually in white color. Those socks were originally from America, however, they caught on in Japan among schoolgirls in the 1990s (Ashcraft, Ueda, 2010, p. 26. Kawamura, 2013, p. 55). What is special about the loose socks is that there was no official marketing done by the sellers of the socks, the teenagers were the ones to 'market' the loose socks themselves (Kawamura, 2013, p. 55). The loose socks were also seen as rebellious, since the socks on female students were expected to be neat and ladylike.

Gyaru, as a whole, could be defined as a **rebels**, the *Kogals* of the 1990s were rebelling the traditional beauty standards, however, when magazines shifted their focus from mere documentation over to motivating their readers to be more extreme than other readers of the same magazine, the *ganguros* became more of a **cutie**, since they were not entirely doing it for the sake of rising up against the rigorous dress codes of their schools or standards of society.

Lolita fashion (ロリータファッション)

The main characteristics of Lolita fashion is, a poofy skirt or a dress in a length

that reaches down to ones knees, even further below, perhaps with ruffles and/or ornaments such as lace and bows, a headdress which could be a bonnet or one or two bows, a Victorian, Rococo, and/or Baroque inspired fashion sense, and an overall doll-like-look. The name of this fashion style, *Lolita*, might remind people from the Western world (North-America, Europe, Australia, New-Zealand, etc.) of a novel of the same name, written by Vladimir Nabokov, about an underage girl, *Lolita*, who is in a sexual relationship with her stepfather. However, Lolita fashion, which originated in Japan, is not about sexual desires of young children, is about feeling young and innocent, free from the responsibilities of adulthood, “an escape to a childish world of cute” (Talmadge, 2008).

Lolita fashion has its roots in the *kawaii* (かわいい, cute) culture that became popular in Japan in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as heavily inspired by the clothing aristocrats wore in the French Rococo era and the Victorian era, and it was also somewhat influenced by a fashion style known as *Otome-kei*. *Otome* means *maiden* when translated from Japanese to English, and the style may be best described as a toned down and a more natural looking version of a today's Lolita, clothing looking like they belong to little girls in the 1950s-1960s, yet are made for grown-up women. Moreover, in the 1990s, *Visual-kei*, which will be discussed later in this thesis, was a heavy inspiration for the fashionable people frequenting to *Harajuku*. One particular band in the *Visual-kei* scene, *Malice Mizer*, had a major influence on the *Harajuku* fashion scene, especially in early 2000s, and in particular one of its frontmen, *Mana-sama*³, as he is affectionally called by his fans, had a colossal influence on Lolita

3 The word *sama* (様) is an honorific suffix in Japanese language, which is used for people in higher rank than the speaker, in this case, the fans of *Mana* add *sama* to his name to show devotion and respect for him.

fashion, notably on Gothic Lolita fashion. He established a well-known, high-end Gothic Lolita brand, *Moi-Meme-Moitie*, in the early 2000s.

A variety of Lolita fashion sub-styles can be found when looking through magazines that focus on the fashion, such as *Gothic & Lolita Bible*, as well on the World Wide Web when glancing through websites that explain the subculture and its fashion. Two of the most popular types of Lolita are Sweet Lolita and Gothic Lolita, and another kind, Classic Lolita, has been rapidly becoming as popular as Sweet and Gothic Lolita. The main differences between those three main subtypes are the color schemes and the accessories, and the prints or patterns on the dresses. Gothic Lolita might be the easiest to distinguish of the three styles, it is usually dark, mostly in black color, with splashes of white, red, and occasional blue color, and with gothic themes such as bats, crosses, and skulls. Sweet Lolita, best known for the sweet, childish themes, including sweets and desserts, cute animal prints, and pastel hues such as pink, baby blue, white, and mint. Classic Lolita has more muted color schemes compared to the other Lolita styles, such as brown and green, even dusty pink in some cases, and more down-to-earth patterns and prints, with flowers such as roses as a common theme, as well as stuffed animals, desserts such as cakes and pancakes, can be seen. The main keywords of Classic Lolita is elegance and maturity (Hello Lace, n.d.).

Lolita fashion has a number of unofficial guides, including ones for helping newcomers of the subculture to avoid becoming an object of ridicule, or *ita*, “a less-than-nice term for someone trying to dress Lolita but doesn't quite get it right.”(Dee, 2009). Other guides include how thick the petticoat under the skirt or dress should be, how short or long the hemline should be, color combination, and last but not least, how

the wearer should carry themselves while dressed in Lolita fashion (lolita_handbook, 2006). Some public figures in the Lolita fashion scene have their own, specific ideas on how the ideal Lolita should be like, e.g. *Mana-sama*, of Visual *kei* rock bands *Malice Mizer* and *Moi dix Mois*, and has been credited as the creator of EGL (Elegant Gothic Lolita) and EGA (Elegant Gothic Aristocrat) (Keet, 2007, p. 87-88), considers the ideal Gothic Lolita should be five feet four, live in a manor, listen to French gothic music, and read European children's literature (Keet, 2007, p. 87-88), to name a few examples.

Although Lolita fashion may appear exceptionally feminine, and may make the wearers seem demure and powerless, the wearers of Lolita fashion are possibly, to a certain extent, protesting against patriarchy, that women are viewed as sexual objects and should only exist as things to be enjoyed, but not as actual people who have their own life and independence, as well as interests in various things that are more important than serving the man/their husband (Talmadge, 2008).

Lolita seems to have sprung up in the 1990s, and became a known style in the early half of the 2000s as an important part of the *Harajuku* scene, and looking through the pages of *Fruits*, one can see the beginning of Lolita, with few noted Lolita brands, such as *Pretty* (now known as *Angelic Pretty*), and *Baby, the Stars Shine Bright*, which were, and still are, popular brands within the Lolita fashion subculture.

Lolita fashion is, despite being cute-looking, a **rebellious** style, since it is protesting the patriarchy in (Japanese) society, and

Decora (デコラ)

Decora is a style within Harajuku, which is best characterized by the accessories

overload and the bright colors the wearers of *Decora* fashion are clothed in. The word '*Decora*' comes from the English word *decor*, or *decorator*, and shortened and appropriated into the Japanese language.

The leading attribute of *Decora* fashion is set on the accessories, which often is brightly colored, made of plastic, and their hair is often overflowed with hair accessories. *Fruits*, a magazine focusing on street fashion in Japan, is often credited as a major jumping platform for making the style known to the general public (Tokyo Fashion, 2008). *Decora* style has its origins in 1990s *Harajuku*, and on the pages of *Fruits* (2001) and *Fresh Fruits* (2005) by Shoichi Aoki, there are instances of early *Decora* style, along with other fashion styles of 1990s and early 2000s *Harajuku*.

***Fairy Kei* (フェアリー系)**

Fairy *kei* is a more recent style, gaining popularity around 2010. A fairy *kei* coordination is best characterized by its great use of pastel color palette, and retro motifs, such as toys, music notes and retro graphic motifs. Hair accessories are kept at minimum, compared to *Decora*, yet medium sized bows and hair clips in pastel color are seen. Fairy *kei* was previously known as *Spank! girls* or *Spank! style*, named after a shop in Tokyo called *Spank!*, a 1980's inspired apparel shop, selling both vintage clothing and toys from USA, as well as original fashion designs (McInnes, 2011).

***Mori Girl* (森ガール)**

The term *Mori Girl* had its first appearance on a Japanese social media *mixi*, a Japanese social networking service. The main characteristics of *Mori Girl* is on looking like the wearer has its habitat in the woods, and is often characterized by the use of layering of clothes, preferably frumpy vintage clothes; natural makeup (or the appearance of using no make-up), loose and often natural looking hairstyles that look as if it wasn't styled; and the overall carefree appearance of the *Mori Girls* (Fujita, 2010).

Mori Girl, like Lolita fashion, has many 'rules' or checklist which newcomers as well as veterans in *Mori Girl* style should follow (). There is a list which originated on *mixi*, describing the basic foundations of *Mori Girl*, and also serves as a checklist for people to know if they fit the elementals of *Mori Girl* lifestyle. *Mori Girl* fashion draws inspiration from Scandinavian simplicity (in fashion), and additionally is also inspired by nature, as in, in a typical *Mori Girl* coordination, more effort is put into practicability rather than looking nice for the onlookers.

Dolly Kei (ドリー系)

The main aesthetics of Dolly *kei* are vintage clothing and accessories, a fairytale-like appearance, creepy yet cute , and . While *Mori Girl* fashion draws inspiration from vintage Northern European fashion, Dolly *kei* draws inspiration from vintage/antique Eastern European fashion, and unlike *Mori Girl*, does not have any known specific rules or a checklist. The shop *Grimoire*, which specializes in selling vintage clothing from America and Europe, is credited as a pioneer for Dolly *kei* (McInnes, 2010).

Visual kei (ビジュアル系)

Visual kei, a (mostly) rock music and alternative fashion mix up, that began in 1980s, with its height of popularity during the 1990s, and there bands today (2015) that partake in the *Visual kei* scene. Bands in the *Visual kei* scene are known for their extravagant fashion styles and heavy make-up, and band members may as well partake in cross-dressing as a part of the band's image, such as *Mana-sama* of *Malice Mizer* and *Moi Dix Mois*, and *Hizaki* of the band *Versailles*. Fans of *Visual kei* might partake in dressing up in *Cosplay*, dressing up as their favorite *Visual kei* band member, and perhaps dress in the other alternative fashion the fashion styles *Harajuku* has to offer.

The majority of documented street styles and its accompanying subcultures in Tokyo today began to show up in the 1990s, thus leading to the question of whether it was because documentation of the street fashion and culture in Tokyo became more available during the 1990s, or if there might be an ulterior reason. One theory is that the financial collapse of the Japanese economy in the 1990s greatly impacted the growth of the Tokyo street fashion scene.

Theories on relationship between fashion and economy, and economy of Japan.

There have been a number of theories put forth relating to the prediction the state of the local economy to fashion. The best known of which is the 'hemline index', or 'skirt theory', which was first introduced by George Taylor in 1926. This is thought to be a predictor of the direction the stock market is going, i.e. short skirts indicate that the

general public is more confident on that the stock market is going upwards, thus the economy is heading to great, thriving times, and the longer or lower the hemline of the dresses or the skirts, the less confident the public is towards the stock market, meaning that the economy might become worse by the time (Baardwijk, Franses, 2010).

However, this theory, at least nowadays, has a shaky foundation for predictability of the economy today, since the skirts and dresses hemline come in various lengths, and women today may wear trousers instead of wearing skirts (Valenti, n.d.).

Another theory discussed by Lee Sheppard in her Forbes article, “*Fashion's True Leading Economic Indicator*” (2013), is that nail polish is a better, more accurate indicator of a country's economy. The darker the color of the nail polish, the more likely the economy is going to be bad, and the lighter the color, the better the economy.

Furthermore, as Sheppard states in her article:

“A couple of years ago, New York socialites began wearing black polish, heretofore the preserve of Goths and punks. Usually, denizens of Manhattan's upper east side stick with ballet slippers pink because economic life is always good for them. When they wear black polish, things are really bad (Sheppard, 2013).”

More predictors of the relationship between fashion and economy have been argued by economists, including that people buy smaller items, such as lipstick, which may or may not be an expensive branded item (Schaefer, 2008), instead of buying expensive clothing item, to make up for the lack of money for the bigger, more expensive goods, such as brand clothing. Furthermore, the height of the heels of trendy shoes for women, and its relationship to the economy, have as well been studied, and IBM published a study on that matter in Nov. 2011, and found out that in harder economic times, shoes with high heels (as well as platform shoes) were more desired

than shoes with little to no elevation, and when the economy is better, lower heels are preferred over the high heels (Danchke, 2011).

Between the end of the Second World War (1945) and the early 1990s, Japan was praised for its quick economic recovery after the War, and in the 1980s, the Japanese economy has become one of the richest countries in the world. Instead of mining, and exporting natural resources, such as fossil fuels, Japan created and sold automobiles, electronic hardware and goods to international consumers, and focused on international trade to make up the shortfall of those natural resources (Masamoto, 2014), and in the 1970s and 1980s, the country had gained dominance over the global electronic hardware industry and had even become the “King of the Global Electronics Industry” (Colombo, 2012). The economy of postwar Japan was called a 'miracle', and by the 1980s it was at its peak, and the *yen*, the currency of Japan, was at its strongest. However, by the year 1990, the economy of Japan faced its greatest downturn in recent history, resulting in the 'lost decade' of the 1990s. The results of the 'lost decade' is that youth employment decreased, and new social problems surfaced, such as the *hikikomori* phenomenon, which is, people who withdraw from society, while staying at their home, even confine themselves in their room only, and barely make any contact to people in society; and young people who are *NEET*, that is, people who are Not in Education, Employment or in Training. (Funabashi, Kushner, 2015, p. xxx)

Japanese fashion of the 1970s-1980s in a nutshell.

Kawaii (かわいい, Japanese term for 'cute'), was a very popular style in Japan during the 1980s, and saturated the Japanese media at the time, and the cuteness seeped into fashion styles, such as punk fashion (Kinsella, 1995, p. 220). Everything that was *kawaii* reached its popularity in Japan during the 1980s. Things that were *kawaii*, such as household appliances, stationary, fashion and more, were sought after by people who wanted to remain childlike. (Kinsella, 1995 p. 226)

In the 1980s, the mainstream fashion in Japan was not very different what the North-American and Western-European mainstream fashion in the 1980e, e.g. the hair was big, and the clothes were colorful, albeit pastel hues were more common. Looking at photos of Japanese 'idols' – pop stars, and/or models, usually young people who have a number of fans, (female) idols of the 1980s appeared childlike and innocent, natural, as in looking as if they had little to no make-up, and their hair was mostly loose and looking unconstrained.

The bubble made many people (with jobs⁹ think that they had almost unlimited source of money, and people felt obliged to show their wealth by wearing expensive clothes, jewelry, accessories and sporting the appropriate hairstyles of the decade.

However, in the early 1990s, the 'bubble economy', which had made Japan one of the richest country in the world, collapsed, and left many people unemployed, and the income and promises of a lifelong job which people had relied on up until then in the decades before, were wiped out with the bubble. Cost of food, housing and other necessities were constantly raised, living became more expensive. Clothes and accessories as well became more expensive, which made people depend on their

creativity to put together their style. Young people especially had to rely on being creative while buying and putting together their clothes on their on Sunday, their only day of the week, off school. DIY, or “Do-It-Yourself”, became an essential of Japanese youth fashion. (Groom, 2011, p. 194).

In the 1980s, Japanese fashion designers began exporting their fashion to European and North-American markets, and with their avant-garde fashion design that was divergent from what people outside Japan had seen, garnered interest from the fashion industry abroad. Rei Kawabuko of *Comme des Garçons*, Issey Miyake, and Yohji Yamamoto were the top three designers from Japan that were the most influential to Japanese fashion. (Tokyo Fashion, n.d.).

During the economic boom of the Japanese economy in the 1980s, 'designer-character' brands, also known as 'DC brands', surged in popularity (FASHION JAPAN: G.V.G.V., n.d.), and expensive designer brands from around the world, such as Chanel and Louis Vuitton, and domestic brands e.g. *Comme des Garçons* as well, were favored.

The future of the young people of Japan today is pretty bleak since the economy stalled in the 1990s (Kawamura, 2013, p. 137), feeling that there is not much to expect for their lives in the future, thus indulging in subcultural living, frequenting *Harajuku*, dressing up in experimental fashion, and partaking in the youth cultures in Japan.

In the late 1980s, the Japanese economy led the nation to believe that there was enough money for everyone, some sort of a gold rush struck down at that time. In the purported 'Bubble Economy' of 1980s Japan, the yen was one of the strongest currencies in the world at the time, which in turn made imported goods cheaper than usual, and foreign travel was inexpensive as well.

Although *kawaii* things were popular in the 1980s, they are still desirable today. When the internet made it easier for sharing information across the world, reports about Japanese fashion became easily available, inspiring people outside Japan to emulate the styles that were seen on photos of Japanese people in different fashion styles, including *kawaii* fashion. *Kawaii* items then gained popularity amongst foreigners who were enthusiastic about Japanese pop culture, becoming a sought after concept.

Globalization of Japanese street fashion

Internationally, contemporary Japanese fashion designers have been known for their avant-garde approach in their works, appearing first in the 1970s, treating fashion design more as an art form rather than as an industrial design for consumers.

Since the mid-2000s, Japanese street fashion has garnered considerable attention from people outside Japan, mostly through the internet. Before the internet became a major source of information, very few foreigners enjoyed the experience of visiting *Harajuku* and *Shibuya* and who noticed the people dressed in idiosyncratic fashion. When the internet became a popular sharing platform in the late 1990s and 2000s, photos and online articles about the street fashion and subcultures in Japan caught people's attention, and further information on that matter began to spread out outside the streets of Tokyo.

Fashion worldwide received a great impact from the internet in the 2000s with increased access through the internet to the latest fashion related news (Mendes, Haye, 2010, p. 276), and trends were much quicker to be 'in' and to go out of fashion. Thus there is no wonder that images and information of the street fashion scene in Tokyo garnered interest all over the world with increased exposure through the internet.

Although the street fashion in *Harajuku* and *Shibuya* have been heavily influenced by fashion outside Japan, mainly from North-America and Europe, and foreign media has brought attention to the Japanese street fashion scene with foreigners turning their heads in disbelief, there are also people abroad who have taken fashionable cues from the Tokyo youth fashion subcultures in Japan. Musicians in America, such as Gwen Stefani and Nicki Minaj, have praised the '*Harajuku* Girls' for having a 'wicked

style' (Perry, Stefani, 2004), and called themselves '*Harajuku Barbie*' (HipHopStan.com, 2009), respectively.

A wide variety of online blogs from all over the world exists, featuring the street styles of Tokyo, often focusing on one particular fashion styles, such as Lolita fashion, Fairy *kei*, *Mori Girl*, *Decora*, and any kind of *Gyaru* fashion styles. A number of the people blogging (in English) about Japanese street fashion are people who live the fashion, and dress up in the fashion everyday (or at least make it appear as if they do so). Through their blogging, they offer a glimpse into the life of the followers of Japanese street fashion all over the world, and give a hint of how widespread and popular a particular street style from Japan is in each part of the world. Numerous blogs of the same matter also exists within the Japanese side. Examining both the Japanese and the international blogs, a limited difference is seen between the two.

Although international enthusiasts of Japanese street fashion follow the same trends the Japanese street fashion has, a slight difference could be noticed, which will now be discussed.

Differences between street fashion in Japan and in the world.

With online articles such as “6 Japanese Subcultures That Are Insane (Even for Japan)” (Shakespeare, 2010), the people outside Japan reading those kind of articles might get the erroneous idea that the Japanese people always dress up in such garish fashion, along with the more traditional clothing. However, that is not the case, since most people prefer clothing that is far more appropriate for work, school, and daily life in general, and the majority of Japanese people who frequent *Harajuku* are either people

just visiting/sightseeing or have non-fashion related business to attend in *Harajuku* and neighboring areas.

When comparing street fashion in Japan to N-America and Europe, some differences in how street fashion enthusiasts approach their style becomes apparent, especially if the style has an international following, e.g. punk fashion and gothic fashion, to give an example.

Gothic fashion in North America and in Europe (Germany, United Kingdom, France, etc.), in comparison to Japanese gothic fashion, tends to have a rougher characteristics, and might be considered as a symbol of rejection of mainstream culture as well as a rebellion against the 'normal' in society, while the gothic fashion in Japan tend to have more of a cute, *kawaii*, approach, perhaps even a romantic sense of style (Monden, 2008), mixing it with the darkness and gloominess the gothic fashion and lifestyle has to offer. The same goes for punk fashion and other styles that are international in origin.

The state of the Japanese street fashion today

Although the Japanese street fashion and subculture scene garnered much deserved attention both internationally and domestically in the 2000s, the street fashion subcultures in Tokyo may have been on the decline, if some news are to be believed. In recent years, the stables of the *Gyaru* magazines, such as *egg* and *Koakuma Ageha*, have stopped publications, and there have been articles and discussions on the internet, on where the *Gyarus* and the *Harajuku girls/kids* are disappearing to, and that street fashions of *Harajuku* have been fading away. TokyoFashion.com argues:

“The styling/fashion part of gyaru culture are just one element. Wasn’t gyaru culture of the 1990 originally about rebellion against Japanese society as well? What happened to the famous gyaru attitude? Is it gone as well? Looking at the current trends in gyaru, much of it definitely seems more sweet than scary. Could it be that gyaru has simply matured and become, like punk, passé? Even though real punks still exist, mostly the “punk” you see in the media is about marketing an “image” not about anything with substance behind it. Sid Vicious is dead. Joey Ramone is dead. Even Kurt Cobain is dead. Is “gyaru” on its way to becoming just another marketing term used to help companies sell more product?” (Is Shibuya Gyaru Culture in Decline? If So, Why?, 2011).

However, a year after this article was published, TokyoFashion.com posted another article concerning the *gyaru* subculture, about a new *gyaru-sa* called *Black Diamond*, reviving the deep tan appearance that “[t]en years ago, their dark tans [...] may have led to these girls being labeled ganguro. However, kuro gyaru is a thoroughly modern version of the super-tanned gyaru.” (Gyaru United, 2012).

New fashion styles and subcultures in Tokyo oscillate, and it is practically absurd to document every single style that pops up every year in Tokyo. University students 'graduate' from their circles once they are old enough (usually at twenty years

of age) and may not go as frequently to *Shibuya* or *Harajuku* as they used to, while young new faces show up every year, perhaps finding their niche in the street fashion scene, replacing their predecessors in the scene. Meanwhile, photographers, from all over the world, appear to capture the divergent fashions on the streets of *Harajuku*, *Shibuya*, and neighboring places in Tokyo, documenting what followers of the Tokyo street fashion scene are wearing each time, yet also influencing the fashion on the streets. Magazines, such as *Kera!*, *Zipper*, and *Fruits*, report through their street snap pages what people who frequent to *Harajuku* wear, showing the state of the street fashion in Japan. Websites, such as *TokyoFashion.com* and *JapaneseStreets.com*, both English language websites, introduce the Japanese street fashion scene to audience all over the world, showing the plethora of styles that exist, as well as events that are held in *Harajuku*, such as *Harajuku Fashion Walk* (a regular gathering of Harajuku fashion enthusiasts in Tokyo), and events held (or hosted) by shops and/or prominent persons of the street fashion scene in Japan.

Conclusion

Although the economic turmoil in 1990s Japan did affect the Japanese street fashion scene in some ways, the history and connection of the American occupation army base and the easy availability of American goods in Harajuku, as well as increased exposure and the shift of focus from fashion photographs taken in studios to street snaps of pedestrians wearing unique fashion styles, had a greater impact on the growth of the Japanese street fashion scene. The *pedestrian heaven* in *Omotesando* on Sundays in 1977-1998 made a considerable impact of the street culture in *Harajuku*, and shaped the youth street culture in Tokyo. Furthermore, the attention of the subcultures of *Shibuya*, namely the *Gyaru*, was established through magazines, such as 'egg',

Although the economic turmoil and subsequent 'lost decade' may not be a direct cause of street fashion in Japan becoming as diverse and prominent today, the uncertainty of the economy today may make young people of Japan indulge in a certain fashion and lifestyle.

The future of the street fashion in Japan is not easy to decipher, and whether *Shibuya* and *Harajuku* will still be the two main center places of fashion-oriented subcultures in Japan in the not-so-distant future is impossible to tell. Other places in Japan could emerge as new center spots of youth and/or fashion subcultures. The divergent street styles in Japan are bound to change with time, evident in the history of the *Gyaru* subculture. New styles become in vogue, other styles fall out of favor, and styles that were fashionable in the past may see surge in popularity through the support of nostalgic admirers of certain fashion styles. Yet, the future remains unknown for the generations that will succeed the street fashion subcultures in Japan. However, the only

thing that is certain is that young people of the future would most likely keep the street fashion scene alive, and the Japanese street fashion scene will keep growing and gain more popularity around the world, as long as there are people who desire to revel in fashion styles that may not always be considered 'normal' by societies of the world.

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