Cultural Globalization in People’s Life Experiences:
Japanese Popular Cultural Styles in Sweden

Master Thesis
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Preface

This thesis has been carried out at the Department for Fashion Study, Stockholm University, during the spring semester 2011.

I would like to thank Dr Jacob Östberg at the Department for Fashion Studies for being my supervisor and providing knowledgeable advices and comments concerning this thesis. I also appreciate the supporting feedback from Dr Louise Wallenberg and Professor Patrizia Calefato. Finally, I am grateful for the good company and meaningful advices from my class mates. I am very happy to be a member of this year’s Master students with my dear class mates.

Keiko Mikami, Stockholm 24/5 2011
Abstract

In the last two decades, Japanese popular culture has gained a strong global foothold and the field has been especially noted from the 1990s because of its considerable expansion in other cultural contexts. In this thesis, the field of Japanese popular culture is explored in Swedish cultural context from the perspective of cultural globalization. By conducting semi-structured interviews with the Swedish fans, people’s life experiences, such as their identity narrative and their expression based on their cultural level, are analyzed.

The results of this study made one cultural flow in globalization clear. The flow of Japanese popular culture style, which originated in Far East Asia have a deep relation with Swedish local fans’ life experiences. Even though the fans of Japanese popular culture style physically live in Sweden, they consume same cultural products with Japanese people and enjoy same activities in Japanese cultural context. In this sense, they found as living Japanese lifestyle in Sweden. However, the close examination of the fans lifestyle in Swedish context made it clear that the elements of Japanese popular culture are translated to be able to adopt into local situation by reflecting Swedish fans’ cultural background. That is to say, the local people are not passively consuming imported cultural forms but they consume the foreign forms in their local cultural context, such as their identity construction. Local people’s life experiences remain as local as before the cultural globalization process begin.
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1 Introduction

This thesis explores the field of Japanese popular culture in Swedish cultural context from the perspective of cultural globalization. The field of Japanese popular culture has been especially noted from the 1990s because of its considerable expansion in other cultural contexts e.g. with conventions. Several scholars\(^1\) have discussed about the expansion of Japanese popular culture and the reason for its popularity mainly in terms of “anime” (Japanese style animation) and “manga” (Japanese comic books). With the recent popularity of cosplay (which means “costume play” in Japanese, i.e. to dress up as your favorite manga or game character) worldwide, scholars\(^2\) also discussed about the phenomenon in relation with anime and manga’s popularity.

The fans special use of Japanese popular cultural style fashion or costumes, their motivation to wear their outfits, and the relation between their styles and their identity in terms of cultural globalization has been neglected in earlier analyses. From the perspective of fans’ identity narratives, the unique and distinctive styles may communicate meanings as signs. Also, their expression of identity through Japanese popular cultural style outfits would involve a translation of expressions based on fans’ cultural background.

This thesis will analyze global cultural flow and its impacts on people’s life experiences, by focusing on fans of Japanese popular culture style in Swedish cultural context. Especially, focus will be on transnational Japanese popular cultural styles’ significance in terms of fans’ identity narratives and their translation of expressions depending on their cultural background.

This thesis is organized starting from the background of Japanese popular cultural styles and discusses research questions, methodology, literature review, results and discussion, and conclusion thereafter.

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2 Background of Japanese Popular Cultural Styles

2.1 History of Japanese Popular Culture in American Cultural Context

In this chapter Susan Napier’s study of American anime and manga fandom will be introduced. Napier is a professor in Japanese studies at Tufts University and has carried out several studies about Japanese popular culture. She specifically focuses on anime and manga. Even though this thesis focus on styles that Japanese popular culture fans use, her studies provide helpful knowledge that can be a base for studying Japanese popular culture. Since all the aspects of Japanese popular culture discussed here is strongly connected to Japanese popular culture fandom, appeal, and influence on its fans, Napier’s work provide helpful knowledge to this thesis.

2.1.1 The Rise of Japanese Popular Culture in America

According to Napier, in the last two decades, Japanese popular culture has gained a strong global foothold. Japan has been known in the 1980s largely for its large economic rise. By the end of the 1990s, according to Napier, Japanese cultural products ranging from Hello Kitty and Pokemon to Japanese fashion began to flood the world. Around year 2000, Japan was “cool”: the pop star Gwen Stefani had a hit record singing about “Harajuku Girls” (Harajuku is a Tokyo neighborhood known for its fashion). The rock group Linkin Park won an MTV Viewer’s Choice Award for “Breaking the Habit” with their anime-style video recorded by a Japanese animator. Quentin Tarantino would feature a violent anime-style sequence in his 2003 hit film, Kill Bill.

Napier argues that although there would be several reasons for the expansion of Japanese popular culture, it is easy to estimate that the technological development, especially internet, surely have helped the spread of Japanese anime and manga. According to Napier, early Western anime fans often tend to come from the scientific and technological fields since they were early users of the internet. Napier emphasizes that the internet was probably the single most important instrument in creating the anime fan “community”.

2.1.2 Emergence of Japanese popular cultural convention in America

According to Napier, in the 1990s, Japan influenced many forms of popular culture

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3 Napier, From Impressionism to Anime, cover page.
4 Napier, From Impressionism to Anime, 127.
5 Napier, From Impressionism to Anime, 127.
6 Napier, From Impressionism to Anime, 136.
worldwide, including music, fashion, and horror movies. Anime and manga and the fan culture that they created had the most penetrating impact on a global cultural scale.\(^7\)

Napier tells about the genesis of Japanese popular culture conventions. It emerged in 1993 when a group of students at Penn State University decided to organize a convention at State College Pennsylvania that would be free of commercialism and industry pressure. The convention was simply for anime enthusiasts. Ten years later, the event has become one of the biggest anime conventions on the East Coast of America, bringing in music groups from Japan, a variety of guests, and a wide range of anime related entertainment and panels.\(^8\)

Earlier than the emergence of the convention, according to Napier, anime was only being shown as a small part of science-fiction conventions. During such events, the first group of Americans brought the *Uchusenkan Yamato* movies, which was known as *Star Blazers*, to a sci-fi convention in the early 1980s.\(^9\) Originally *Uchusenkan Yamato* is credited with being the main drive behind the beginning of anime fandom in Japan, occupying nearly the position of *Star Wars* in the mind of Japanese fans. However, unlike *Star Wars*, *Uchusenkan Yamato* is far darker. It explores issues such as apocalypse, historical memory, and the fundamental need for human connection. Quite often the “bad” side wins. Its dubbed version on American television, *Star Blazers*, had become popular for American youths, although many did not know it is a Japanese product. The screening of *Uchusenkan Yamato* was a watershed because of its Japanese origin. It was shown again, and again. Many members of the audience had never seen anything like it; *Uchusenkan Yamato* is a high drama to which American viewers were unused.\(^10\)

Thus, anime fandom was born twenty years ago. Over the last decade the conventions have grown enormously in number and include fans of manga and consumers of Japanese popular culture in general.\(^11\)

### 2.2 Growing Japanese Popular Cultural Conventions and Fans Styles in It

In addition to the American example of Japanese popular cultural expansion reported by Napier, this chapter will introduce other Japanese popular cultural conventions in foreign contexts. Several of the Japanese popular culture conventions are recognized and reported by Japanese

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7 Napier, *From Impressionism to Anime*, 125.
8 Napier, *From Impressionism to Anime*, 125.
9 Napier, *From Impressionism to Anime*, 125.
10 Napier, *From Impressionism to Anime*, 126.
11 Napier, *From Impressionism to Anime*, 126.
Sakurai is one such researcher and is a popular culture adviser for the Japanese government. He has written three books: *Cute revolution worldwide*, *Foreign diplomacy of anime* and *Japanese revival with anime*.

Sakurai reports Japan Expo in Paris as one of the most notable conventions. The event began in 1999 and is continuing annually. On July 2008 Sakurai observed its 9th convention, which continued for 4 days and included 134,000 participants. The contents of the convention range from anime DVD and manga market, to famous anime and manga producers autograph sessions. Sakurai emphasizes that the most remarkable finding in the convention for him was the participants’ fashion styles, which mixed Harajuku fashion and anime styles, such as cosplay. He reported that except the large number of cosplay style participants, the most common style at the convention was Gothic Lolita style with mainly black motif. The second most common style was school uniforms. According to his interview, many participants who had uniform style answered that they buy their school uniform style fashion online or make it by themselves.

Sakurai also observed Japan Expo’s 10th convention in Paris in 2009 and describes changes from the previous event. The 10th convention had less cosplay style participants and more Gothic Lolita and school uniform style participants. Even though anime and manga enthusiasm did not come to an end, Sakurai argues, cuteness aspects took over the convention remarkably. For example there were ranges of stores selling Harajuku style clothes and accessories as well. According to Sakurai’s interview, the reason for the change can be estimated to have something to do with the cute aspect. He assumes that by learning from anime and manga characters’ fashion and through internet, cute styles made participants aware of the convention.

Sakurai also discusses about the Kawaii (cute) fest held in Bangkok in March 2009. It was a fashion convention that focuses on school uniform style, which was held by the Japan Foundation and Japanese embassy in a shopping mall’s event space. It included a school-uniform style fashion-show featuring Thai models and speeches by fashion magazine publishers. The trigger of the convention, according to Sakurai, is the tremendous popularity of school uniform style fashion. Local fashion magazines, school uniform style fashion shops, high schools that adopted the Japanese

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12 Takamasa, *Cute Revolution in the World*.
school uniform style, clearly indicate the popularity of the uniform styles, Sakurai writes.18

Besides Sakurai’s reports, Japan Times Online tells about an event called Animania in Australia as well. Japan Times Online reported in August 2008 that the Animania Festival, a two-day festival and celebration of Japanese popular culture, saw thousands of fans from across Australia in Sydney. Participants relish all things Japanese, from origami workshops, doll photography to plates of steaming "yakisoba" (fried noodles).19

The article’s main focus is about two cosplayers who were chosen as the first-ever Australian representatives for the World Cosplay Summit that was held in Japan in August 2009. Although the competition was stiff, Lowgren, 16, and Lee, 20, received delighted applause for their emotive performance. Both are currently studying and spend all their spare time working on costumes. Lowgren commented "we've been working on these costumes for five months. I haven't slept for the last two weeks and she hasn't slept for the last four weeks".20 Here we can see how the participants’ enthusiasm for the cosplay is strong and their effort to create their costumes is enormous. Their enthusiasm shows how important the cosplay is for participants.

Moreover, as discussed by Napier in previous chapters, there are conventions in America as well. Roland pointed out the special traits of American cosplay conventions. According to him, compared to Japanese cosplay events in Japan, American convention participants display their anime affection more publicly than Japanese fans. He refers to the difference of Karaoke in America and Japan as an example of this public and private orientation of each culture.21 Even though the events deal with the Japanese cultural products, there are explicit cultural differences that are communicated through their use of costumes in conventions.

Throughout the above reports about conventions, the notable remark that is found is participants’ use of Japanese popular culture style outfit. All over the events, the authors mention about the specific styles and the first thing to get the researcher’s eye in the convention is the participants’ special clothes. Cosplay, school uniform style, Gothic Lolita style, etc., the participants’ outfit styles ranges wide but all of them are special, differing from the ordinary clothes that we can find on the streets. Significantly their styles are unique.

20 “Japan next for Aussie ‘cosplay’ champions.”
21 Kelts, *Japanamerica*, 149.
2.3 Japanese Popular Cultural Conventions in Sweden

Sweden, the research site of this thesis, has a big scale convention as well, same with the earlier mentioned countries. It is a Japanese popular culture convention called UppCon. The name comes from the location where the convention held, Uppsala, a city less than an hour from the Swedish capital Stockholm. The event started out 10 years ago as a small event, including about 60 people in a small movie theater during one day. Over the years it grew larger, expanded itself and added contents, such as videogames, stores, karaoke etc.

UppCon in 2010 had about 4,000 visitors, around 60% were girls and the average visitor was 18 years old. The event started on a Friday and finished Sunday. Participants could rent a place to sleep over the night to be able to participate in all three days’ programs. It was organized by people somewhat interested in the Japanese culture. Since the event was non-profit, people who organized it did not get paid. The organizers were about 20 people who were involved in the whole planning phase and during the event about 200 people were working as staff members.22

The events in the latest UppCon in 2010 contained a variety of activities from karaoke, Japanese bands’ performance, anime DVD and manga sale to a Japanese style fashion show. Also here participants donned their Japanese style fashion, proudly walked around the convention hall and attended each session. Similar to other conventions described above, their style range from cosplay, Gothic Lolita and school uniform to Japanese street style. There were several stores that sell such fashion items in the convention hall.

Moreover, there are several small-scaled events with Japanese popular culture theme in Sweden, such as PeppCon, Meuwcon, AnimeckaCon etc. PeppCon is organized by the UppCon organizers and can be considered as small-sized one day UppCon in the center of Stockholm. AnimeckaCon and Meuwcon were held in 2010, but by other organizers than UppCon.

According to their website, the Japan-inspired convention Animeckacon started in 2009. At the first convention in 2009, 150 persons participated and in 2010, around 200 persons attended. Activities during Animeckacon range from a fashion show and cosplaying to live performances.23

Meuwcon started as a mini-convention at home and was developed as a larger project on a “by-youth-for-youth”-basis for the second year. For the third Meuwcon, the convention has grown to have 20 main staff who works with sponsors, volunteers and enthusiast circles.24 During the three-day Meuwcon03 in August 2010, around 1,300 people visited each day. Most of them were

22 Email interview with the UppCon organizer, February 1st, 2011.
13-19 years old. Their activities include arcade games, debates about cosplay and a cosplay gala evening.25

In addition to the conventions held around the Stockholm area, there was a large-scale convention, ConFusion, in Göteborg in January 2011. The event lasted for three days at the Museum of World Culture in the middle of Göteborg city. Around 760 people participated and 150 volunteers worked during the convention.26 Except for anime screenings and a game room, they had a fashion show and three cosplay shows. Some pictures from this convention are available in Appendix B.

26 Email interview with organizer of ConFusion, February 1, 2011.
3 Research Questions

3.1 Research Purpose

This thesis considers globalization from the perspective of culture. Globalization is a complex, multifaceted process that operates simultaneously in diverse realms, e.g. the cultural, the economical, the political, the environmental, and can thus be embraced from numerous angles. The cultural function is just one such angle.\textsuperscript{27} According to Hannerz, in the last decade or so, globalization and transnationality have become a new research focus.\textsuperscript{28} He argues that flux, mobility, recombination and emergence have become favored themes as globalization and transnationality frequently offer the contexts for our thinking about culture.\textsuperscript{29} In this thesis, by taking transnational Japanese popular culture styles as one example of transnational cultural forms in globalization, the global cultural flow and its impact for individuals’ life experiences were analyzed. The following introduces a theory by Inda and Rosaldo about cultural globalization and the cultural flow in globalization. They take a macroscopical view of globalization and provide clear theoretical concepts of cultural globalization with a wide viewpoint. Thereafter, Polhems’ theory about globalization’s significant impact on the fashion industry will be presented, since his focus on the fashion industry includes this thesis’s focus topic: Japanese popular culture styles.

3.1.1 Cultural Globalization

Inda and Rosaldo argues that nowadays, it is impossible to think about culture strictly in localized terms, because globalization has radically pulled culture apart from place. It has visibly dislodged culture from particular locals.\textsuperscript{30} They argue that globalization made a world where cultural forms such as capital, people, commodities, images, and ideas are unhinged from particular localities. Consequently, Inda and Rosaldo state that culture became highly mobile and deterritorialized.\textsuperscript{31}

However, according to Inda and Rosaldo, the uprooting of culture is only half of the story of globalization. Cultural flows do not just float ethereally across the globe, but are always inscribed in a specific cultural environment, i.e. the cultures are reterritorialized. The term refers to the process of

\textsuperscript{28} Ulf Hannerz, “Flows, Boundaries and Hybrids: Keywords in Transnational Anthropology,” (part of a research project issued by the UK Economic and Social Research Council 1997-2003 as working paper WPTC-2K-02, \url{http://www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk} accessed 2011-02-19), 3.
\textsuperscript{29} Hannerz, “Flows, Boundaries and Hybrids,” 2.
\textsuperscript{31} Inda and Rosaldo, “Tracking Global Flows,” 14.
reinscribing culture in new time-space contexts, of re-localizing it in specific cultural environments. It suggests, Inda and Rosaldo emphasize, that while the connection between culture and specific places may be weakening, it does not mean that culture has altogether lost its place. It just signifies that culture has been placed otherwise, in a way that it no longer necessarily belongs in a particular place. The globalized culture is both deterritorialized and reterritorialized. This double movement is the recent situation for global culture.\textsuperscript{32}

3.1.2 Cultural Flow in Globalization

According to Inda and Rosaldo, the traffic in culture had been considered to move primarily in one direction, from the First World (or West/center) to the Third World (or rest/periphery). It had been stated that the traffic in culture is leading to cultural homogenization. The impact of western culture had been perceived as rather overwhelming\textsuperscript{33}, i.e. western imperialist expansion. It indicated that cultural diversity was disappearing as non-western cultures were incorporated into a western-dominated homogenized culture.\textsuperscript{34}

However, according to Inda and Rosaldo, the discourse of cultural imperialism fails to capture its complexities. The world as a homogenized or westernized entity is doubted.\textsuperscript{35} Third World consumers are not passive; they don’t absorb imported ideologies, values, and life-style positions. They interpret it according to their own cultural codes. The imported foreign cultural forms tend to be customized. They are interpreted, translated, and appropriated according to local conditions of reception. Of course there are limits to how one can interpret the foreign forms. But, the influence of foreign forms is rather complicated than the discourse of cultural imperialism.\textsuperscript{36}

Inda and Rosaldo argue that the flow of meaning is not necessarily from center to periphery (from the First World to the Third World). Culture does move from periphery to center, the rest to the West. For example, Indian, Chinese, Korean, Thai and Mexican cuisines became standard in the West, and people who immigrated to the West have set themselves up within the very heart of the West.\textsuperscript{37} The normative character of the Western nation-state has been called into question and unsettled. There are reverse cultural flows, peripherization.\textsuperscript{38}

Moreover, Inda and Rosaldo suggests that because the Third world is in the First and the

\textsuperscript{32} Inda and Rosaldo, “Tracking Global Flows,” 14.
\textsuperscript{33} Inda and Rosaldo, “Tracking Global Flows,” 15.
\textsuperscript{34} Inda and Rosaldo, “Tracking Global Flows,” 17.
\textsuperscript{35} Inda and Rosaldo, “Tracking Global Flows,” 18.
\textsuperscript{36} Inda and Rosaldo, “Tracking Global Flows,” 20.
\textsuperscript{38} Inda and Rosaldo, “Tracking Global Flows,” 24.
First World is in the Third, it is getting hard to specify where one entity begins and the other one end. Furthermore, Inda and Rosaldo argue that the global cultural encounter takes place not only just between the West and the rest but also within the periphery itself.\textsuperscript{39}

The cultural flow is not an easy concept that can be captured by cultural imperialism, peripherization, or center-periphery discourse. It is more a complicated flow that requires close investigation in each context.

3.1.3 Impact of Globalization on Fashion Industry

According to Polhems, in reaction to the onslaught of globalizations, regional and national identities are now cherished as never before. This is especially evident in the West, where people crave sushi from Japan, batik prints from Java, kung fu movies from Hong Kong, tango from Argentina or beaded jewelry from East Africa, to mention a few examples. They want it precisely for their cultural otherness, for the fact that they have not been ground down and obliterated by globalization.\textsuperscript{40}

Such national identities, national or regional differences, Polhems argues, are rarely objective social facts.\textsuperscript{41} They are mythologies that are just national stereotypes, however, it is impossible to isolate us from their influence. They lurk under our conscious and influence our actions. The world has not become a homogenous whole; the place continues to convey meaning and national identity stereotypes influence our consumer choices. For example, we travel to a particular country with particular mythical expectations of what we will find.\textsuperscript{42}

Polhems argues that countries are brands today. Countries experience shifts in their perception and popularity and they move in and out of fashion. Such national brands have enormous power in the world today with profound political and economic impact. Especially, Polhems emphasizes, the fashion industry is interlinked with national brandings as much as tourism.\textsuperscript{43}

According to Polhems, it is the underlying meaning of the garment rather than the aesthetics of it that particularly attracts us. Garments or accessories that drive from a particular region or nationality tap into the brand message of that place. Essentially, narratives about alternative ways of life, i.e. national brands, are particularly desirable in contemporary fashion. Fashion regularly

\textsuperscript{39} Inda and Rosaldo, “Tracking Global Flows,” 25.
\textsuperscript{41} Polhems, “What to wear in the global village,” 264.
\textsuperscript{42} Polhems, “What to wear in the global village,” 265.
\textsuperscript{43} Polhems, “What to wear in the global village,” 268.
stitches national brand narratives into the semiotic fabric.\(^4^4\)

In sum, globalization has a great impact on people’s choice of garment in means of national branding. Close investigation of people’s choice of garment would help better understanding of national branding or national stereotypes in globalization.

3.2 Research Focus

Based on the cultural globalization theory presented above, the global cultural flow and its impact on individuals’ life experiences will be analyzed by taking transnational Japanese popular culture styles as one example of transnational cultural forms in globalization. With regard to this research purpose, two aspects of people's life experiences will be focused on. The first focus is the identity narrative of Japanese popular culture style fans, how their use of Japanese popular culture styles relates to their identity narrative. The second focus is semiological transition of expression, how fans perceive Japanese popular culture styles and express their intended signification based on their cultural level will be analyzed. The following will introduce the two focused aspects of people’s life experiences.

3.2.1 Identity Narrative of the Fans

The first focus is identity narrative of the fans. The following will introduce some of the theories about modern identity situation and lifestyle choices.

Giddens have written about the motivation of lifestyle choices in terms of modern situation and self-identity. According to him, in modernity, self-identity confronts the individuals with a complex diversity of lifestyle choices and offers little help as to which options should be selected. According to him, in contemporary context, instead of the social categories that cause the subcultural style to express their collective identity against dominant groups, the narrative of self-identity force the individuals to choose their lifestyles. He argues that because lifestyles give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity, they are unavoidable for the individuals and one concerns the primacy of lifestyle.\(^4^5\)

As with the choice of style, the life planning is an important factor to establish and maintain a self-identity and decide daily actions for individuals who get little help from tradition or habit, based


on class differences.\textsuperscript{46} That is to say, modern individuals plan their future according to their will and choose appropriate lifestyles, which express their self-identity. Consequently, it can be understood that individuals require having strong independent wills and managing their life by their planning and decision in modernity.

However, according to Giddens, the plurality of choices confronts individuals in situations of high modernity\textsuperscript{47}, individuals have to choose their lifestyle with their unconfident anxiety. Giddens discusses this unconfident anxiety in terms of lack of psychological support and sense of security. He assumes that modernity breaks down the protective framework of the small community and tradition, replacing them with a much larger and impersonal organization, or abstract system. This can be the advice of an expert, something that can be found in the rise of therapy modes or consulting of all kind. In Polhem’s words, “We are no longer bound by these conditions of our birth”\textsuperscript{48}. As a result, Giddens argues, the individual feels the lack of psychological support and sense of security\textsuperscript{49}.

Not only Giddens, but also other scholars have written about the plurality of choice and the lifestyle choices of identity expression. The options for the lifestyle choices are not only limited in local context but also in global context\textsuperscript{50}, which makes a modern individual’s decision-making harder. As discussed in Kjeldgaard’s research on contemporary youth culture in globalization, youth consumers’ lifestyles, both in urban and rural setting, are presented in global context\textsuperscript{51}. The enormous expansion of Japanese popular culture styles in foreign cultural context clearly indicates the global scale of the plural choices as well. This modern situation that includes globally expanded choices makes fundamental differences in identity construction in contemporary context.

The plurality of choice and the choice of styles as expression of identity can be seen in fashion discourse as well. Thompson and Haytko studied about consumers’ use of fashion discourses. They claim that one prominent use of fashion discourse by consumers is to develop a sense of personal identity\textsuperscript{52}. According to them, consumers use opposing meanings of fashion discourse to address a series of tensions and paradoxes existing between their sense of individual agency, identity,

\textsuperscript{46} Giddens, \textit{Modernity and Self-Identity}, 85-87.
\textsuperscript{47} Giddens, \textit{Modernity and Self-Identity}, 80.
\textsuperscript{48} Polhems, “What to wear in the global village,” 269.
\textsuperscript{49} Giddens, \textit{Modernity and Self-Identity}, 32-33.
\textsuperscript{51} Kjeldgaard and Askegaard, “The Glocalization of Youth Culture,” 239-240.
and their sensitivity to sources of social prescription in their everyday lives.\textsuperscript{53} By choosing lifestyles from modern plural choices, consumers proactively create their expression of identity.\textsuperscript{54}

The relation between the identity and its situation (large numbers of choices in globalization and lack of a protective framework for the small community and tradition) and lifestyle choices can be analyzed by taking Japanese popular culture styles as one example of lifestyle choices. By studying the transnational Japanese popular culture style fans’ identity narratives, a relation between the identity or its situation and lifestyle choices can be clear. This can contribute to the modern identity discourse.

### 3.2.2 Semiological Transition of Expression by Using Cultural Level

The second focus is semiological transition of expression. Hebdige took semiotics into consideration to read expressed styles in subculture and understand their intended expression of identity.\textsuperscript{55} Similarly, in this thesis, through analyzing transnational Japanese popular culture style fans’ intended identity expression, it would be possible to reveal the semiological transition of their expression based on their cultural background. The following will introduce Barthes’ theory about meaning transition depending on contexts and ones cultural background.

By using a semiological method, Barthes analyses transplanted hippies, which originate in a rich American cultural context, in a fairly poor country. Barthes read the original hippies into signifiers, i.e. their styles, such as having a collective cooking pot, going barefoot on the street, dirty body etc., and signified i.e. anti-materialism. According to Barthes, in the case of the hippies, the hidden ideology in the society is materialism. Their styles can be read to signify their collective identity against the ideology of materialism.\textsuperscript{56} However, Barthes claims, they became a copy of poverty in the transplanted context, which is something we should be fighting against in the economic context. By the change of context, the symbols that hippies employed represent different meanings. The context makes dramatical changes to the expressed meaning.

In addition to contexts, Barthes focuses on the difference of interpretation depending on the interpreter’s cultural background. He claims that objects are polysemous, i.e. it readily offers itself to several readings of meaning. In the presence of an object, there are almost always several readings

\textsuperscript{53} Thompson and Haytko, “Speaking of Fashion,” 15.
\textsuperscript{54} Thompson and Haytko, “Speaking of Fashion,” 16.
\textsuperscript{55} Dick Hebdige, Subculture – the meaning of style (London: Routledge, 1999), 8.
possible.\textsuperscript{57} He discusses that the signified, reading of meaning, of objects depend a great deal not on the emitter of the message, but on the receiver, i.e. on the reader of the object. In other words, each of us has several lexicons, several reservoirs of reading, depending on the kind of knowledge, the cultural level, we possess.\textsuperscript{58} Barthes states that meaning is always a phenomenon of culture, a product of culture.\textsuperscript{59}

Barthes also discusses this cultural level as cultural norm. Following Barthes example of cultural norms can help us understand about the concept more clearly. According to the mode of cultural norm, Barthes shows one example. In “a pleated skirt for the mature woman”, the meeting between the signifier and the signified here seems absolutely gratuitous. However, according to Barthes, if we look closer, there is a motivation that is established in relation to distinctly cultural norms. Insofar as the smooth and the curved (suggesting contours) emphasize youth by antinomy, pleats can be thought of as “reserved” for maturity.\textsuperscript{60}

The concept of meaning changes based on “cultural level” or “cultural norm” is discussed as a cultural translation by Calefato\textsuperscript{61}. The concept of cultural translation appears in the discourse of global cultural flow as well. In foreign context, imported foreign cultural forms tend to be customized. They are interpreted, translated, and appropriated according to local conditions of reception.\textsuperscript{62} This customization, interpretation or appropriation is based on the receiver’s cultural level.

Considering Barthes’ theory in the context of transnational Japanese popular culture style, it would be possible to investigate how each individual actor use their own “cultural level” (i.e. cultural norm) to choose appropriate styles to express their self-identities. By analyzing their styles and its significations, the transition of expression based on their cultural level can be understood clearly.


\textsuperscript{58} Barthes, “Semantics of the Object,” 187-188.

\textsuperscript{59} Barthes, “Semantics of the Object,” 190.


4 Methodology

4.1 Qualitative Method: Semi Structured Interview

The research questions presented above are intended for understanding Japanese popular culture style fans’ life experiences in the global cultural flow. To analyze how the respondents experience the world, interview was a helpful and useful method.\(^{63}\) Semi-structured interviews are characterized by a conventional quality in which the interview dialogue is set largely by the participant.\(^{64}\) The interview method can take us into the mental world in the minds of individuals, to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world. It can also take us into the life world of the individual, to see the content and pattern of daily experience. The interview gives us the opportunity to step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do themselves.\(^{65}\)

As in several researches\(^{66}\) about the relation between styles or objects and identity narratives, semi-structured interviews were conducted within this thesis to investigate the research questions. The interview procedures employed here are based on McCracken’s *Long Interview* and Atkinson’s *The Life Story Interview*. The two books explain practical procedures for interviews that aim to understand people’s life experiences and view of their world.

4.2 Photographs

McCracken states that when some kind of participant observation is possible, it has dramatic advantages, as the anthropological investigator is well aware of. It can deliver data that are beyond the conscious understanding.\(^{67}\) Visual information surely helps understanding the respondent’s styles so the respondent’s photographs are involved in the interviews. Respondents are asked to show photographs in which they wear Japanese popular culture style outfits and comment about them in the interviews. Three of five respondents were eager to show their pictures and showed around 10 to 20 pictures. The other two respondents showed one or two pictures.

As Atkinson suggests, photographs and other objects of memory can help people recall the

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\(^{64}\) Thompson and Haytko, “Speaking of Fashion,” 19.
\(^{67}\) McCracken, *The Long Interview*, 28.
stories and events of their lives. They may also provide further insight into the events and experiences. Photographs can also be used as springboards to all kinds of stories, maybe even long-forgotten, stories.68

4.3 Research Site

In the discourse of global cultural flow, Sweden or Europe in general has been discussed very much in the past hundred and fifty years in terms of Americanization.69 However, as presented in the previous chapters, the growing number of Japanese popular culture events and their participants are notable in Sweden as well as other countries. These popularities surely suggest that there is not only Americanization but other cultural flows coming from other countries as well. Fans in the conventions are attracted by Japanese popular culture style fashion and choose such styles for some reason in Sweden. Similar to other countries’ participants, they are highly motivated to dress up in Japanese styles in the convention and have fashion shows. These Swedish fans can be good examples in order to investigate other global cultural flows than Americanization in Europe.

4.4 Respondents

According to McCracken, the respondents should be perfect strangers with analyzing delicate subjects or asking tough questions.70 Also he recommends that respondents should be few in numbers (not more than eight) because the qualitative method does not aim for generalizability, but access to the cultural categories themselves instead of how many and what kind of people have hold these categories.71 Moreover, McCracken suggests that the respondents should not have special knowledge of the topic under study to get fully spontaneous and unstudied responses and avoid over-helpful responds.72

Based on McCracken’s suggestions, five respondents were chosen to conduct interviews with. To keep them anonymous, they are called different names instead of their own name. Five random Swedish names, Bella, Veronica, Ronja, Martin and Lars were given. The respondents were chosen in networks of Japanese popular culture conventions or parties. To create a contrast in the respondents with a variety of style information, persons with as different Japanese popular culture

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70 McCracken, *The Long Interview*, 17.
71 McCracken, *The Long Interview*, 27.
72 McCracken, *The Long Interview*, 37.
styles as possible were chosen. Since this thesis focuses on the global cultural flow, styles that came from Japan (i.e. not specifically only Cosplay or Gothic Lolita styles etc.) as a whole should be in consideration, and thus a variety of Japanese popular culture styles among the respondents was sought. Three of five respondents are female: Bella likes Gyaru style (roughly explained as young woman in Shibuya area style) and liked Lolita style earlier (inspired by Victorian era princess dresses style), Veronica likes Cosplay and Oshare-kei styles (roughly explained as colorful and vibrant style, translating to "fashion conscience") and Ronja liked the Lolita style. The other two respondents are male: Martin likes Gyaruo style (roughly explained as men in Shibuya style) and Lars liked Cosplay. These respondents are from 18 years old to 23 years old. All respondents were students when they were interviewed. They were not perfect strangers for the researcher but the researcher tried not to have a too intimate friendship with the respondents before interviewing. All of them were conscious that they are/were fans of Japanese popular culture and attended conventions at least once. None of the respondents had special knowledge about cultural globalization, identity and semiotic discourses under study.

4.5 Location and Time

The interviews were carried out in the respondent’s or researcher’s house, i.e. the respondents chose the location they liked to be interviewed at. Since both locations had computer and internet, all of the respondents could show their photographs on the computers, except for one of the respondents who used its iPhone to show the photographs. Each interview lasted 45 minutes to 100 minutes.

4.6 Questions

Based on this thesis’s research questions and learning from Muggleton’s interview schedule, a set of questions were generated and asked in the interview. Because the questions were intended to encourage respondents to tell their own story on their own terms, all of the

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73 McCracken, The Long Interview, 37.
74 Patrick Macias and Izumi Evers, Japanese Schoolgirl Inferno (San Francisco: Chronicle Books LLC, 2007), 99.
78 Muggleton, Inside Subculture, 172.
79 Atkinson, The Life Story Interview, 29.
80 McCracken, The Long Interview, 35.
questions prepared in advance were open-ended. If yes-no questions were used, they were followed up with reason-why questions.\textsuperscript{81} During the interviews, the question script was not followed exactly and in order, instead the interview dialog was set largely by the respondent. The questions prepared in advance are available in appendix A.

\textsuperscript{81} Atkinson, \textit{The Life Story Interview}, 31.
5 Literature Review

This chapter will introduce some of the discussions from the fields of Japanese culture discourse, subculture discourse, and identity discourse. The discussions introduced here deal with similar topics as this thesis, but are not a theoretical framework of this research. However, they provide an interesting insight of the research field, which is relevant to this analysis. These disciplines sometimes overlap their research area under the subject of Japanese popular culture style.

5.1 Japanese Culture Discourse

5.1.1 The Reason for Anime’s Popularity

There are several arguments about the reason for Japanese anime’s popularity that could help understanding the attraction of Japanese popular culture styles. There are controversial explanations for its popularity: anime's attraction as its Japanese cultural identity or as its stateless identity.

On the one hand, Napier discuss about the reason for anime’s popularity as a stateless cultural identity. She emphasizes that one of the most popular anime genres, science fiction, is far less culturally specific. Even though some of the elements are highly based on Japanese norms, such as collective sacrifice, it emphasizes more transnational values. Characters are not Japanese and not culturally specific. Some anime even include strong culturally specific situations which problematize the nature of Japanese identity.82

According to Napier, numerous Japanese commentators have described anime as without national identity.83 Some commentators feel that anime and manga characters look “white”, but in fact they exhibit quite a range of characteristics that are not really Caucasian or Japanese, such as the huge eyes and often strongly colored hair.84 Different from conventional live-action films, animated space has potential to be context free. Thus, a candidate from transnational culture tends to participate in animated films.85 In other words, anime is “another world” created by animators who are “stateless”. A non-Japanese description of characters is another aspect of anime’s “stateless” quality.86

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83 Napier, Anime: From Akira to Princess Mononoke, 25.
84 Napier, From Impressionism to Anime, 137.
85 Napier, Anime: From Akira to Princess Mononoke, 24.
86 Napier, Anime: From Akira to Princess Mononoke, 25.
Napier claims that anime characters offer alternative worlds to its Japanese audiences. Oshii suggests that Japanese escape from the fact that they are Japanese and Miyazaki says Japanese hate their own faces. Japanese directors create other worlds, which are separated from the reality of present days.\(^{87}\)

Napier argues further that the reason for animation’s popularity can be explained by anime’s identity, i.e. other worlds, separated from reality. The “statelessness” has increasing attention in global culture. It is not only Japanese audiences who long for an “anywhere” or who are tired of their own face.\(^{88}\) In the stateless fantasy space that anime provides, Japanese or non-Japanese participants can try on a variety of identities.\(^ {89}\) Anime offers space for identity exploration, in which the audience can enjoy otherness.\(^{90}\)

This stateless identity of anime might be able to explain the reason for Japanese style fashion’s popularity. Same with anime, Japanese styles that are recognized by foreign fans are not specifically Japanese, but a bricolage from all over the world. These bricolage styles may possess stateless identities that let foreign fans enjoy otherness and explore other identities.

On the other hand with the stateless identity of Japanese anime, Martinez argues that the Japanese popular culture, including anime, reflects the diversity of Japanese society.\(^{91}\) In Napier’s words, anime keeps the Japanese cultural identity.\(^{92}\) Martinez argues that because media in a developed nation state assumes that their readers share a common language, common experiences and a basic level of literacy, this community requires particular forms of narration. This narration, which is embodied in various types of the mass media, can be understood as a myth. A myth reflects and reinforces the values of constantly changing societies. Popular culture is part of the domain of the mythic. Moreover, as a form of myth, popular culture is able to travel in a global culture\(^{93}\) and thus would be able to attract fans overseas.

In one of such popular cultures in which myths are embodied, i.e. anime, Japanese cultural identities are embodied. In Napier’s view, apocalypse, festival, and elegy are the most significant Japanese cultural identities in anime.\(^{94}\) Anime remains an original product that has been created in modern Japanese culture. This modern Japanese society is unique, Napier argues. It has a complex

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cultural background, such as contradictions between the second largest economy or many positive economic aspects and victimhood from atomic bombs or tense relations with Asian neighbors caused by war criminals, and it is expressed in anime’s range of modes, themes, and imagery.\(^\text{95}\)

The end of the world is an important element in postwar Japanese visual and print culture. Anime’s visual effect can easily represent the destruction.\(^\text{96}\) Napier estimates that the obvious reason for apocalyptic anime is the atomic bombs. Other reasons are an urbanized industrialized society, growing tension between genders, and a collapse of the stock market. The Japanese post-war economic success failed so that the values and goals of post-war were disenchanted. This disenchantment is obvious in youth culture, which celebrates ephemeral young girls’ fashion and a culture of cuteness and high suicide rate.\(^\text{97}\) Many apocalyptic anime seem to express social pessimism.\(^\text{98}\)

Napier argues that “matsuri” (festival) is another important element in Japanese anime. Both traditional and modern, anime captures the notion of “matsuri”, a celebration of the “realm of play and ritual”. Similar to the Western carnival, the luminal space of festivals allows controlled chaos, in which people behave extraordinary. Japanese festivals are concerned more with a temporary leaving of the social order, in which it provides a brief playful respite from conformity. This often contains sexual and violent themes. Many anime express this spirit of the festival.\(^\text{99}\)

According to Napier, anime also exhibits the lyric and the elegiac mode. The wistful mood is an important element in Japanese cultural expression. In pre-modern Japanese culture, the poetry and romance celebrated the beauty of transient and bittersweet pleasure. In the past, this beauty was likely to have connection to the natural world, such as cherry blossom or water imagery.\(^\text{100}\) The elegiac mode exists in a variety of genres. While the elegiac mode is perhaps less central to anime than the modes of wither apocalypse or festival, it still have considerable influence, adding poignancy.\(^\text{101}\)

Two of three identity aspects of anime-works presented by Napier, apocalypse and festival, can be seen in Japanese style fashion as well. The apocalypse aspect can be seen, as described by Napier, in cute fashion styles. Because of the Japanese post-war economic success’ fail, the values and goals of post-war Japan was disenchanted, so that several popular cultural fashions emerged

\(^{95}\) Napier, \textit{Anime: From Akira to Princess Mononoke}, 28.
\(^{96}\) Napier, \textit{Anime: From Akira to Princess Mononoke}, 29.
\(^{97}\) Napier, \textit{Anime: From Akira to Princess Mononoke}, 29.
\(^{98}\) Napier, \textit{Anime: From Akira to Princess Mononoke}, 29-30.
\(^{99}\) Napier, \textit{Anime: From Akira to Princess Mononoke}, 30.
\(^{100}\) Napier, \textit{Anime: From Akira to Princess Mononoke}, 31.
\(^{101}\) Napier, \textit{Anime: From Akira to Princess Mononoke}, 32.
which express disenchantment from previous values and goals, such as cute fashion. This style expresses the apocalypse of the previous value system and the emergence of new value systems.

The matsuri aspect can be seen in Japanese popular cultural fashion styles as well. Their prominent vivid colors and outstanding extreme styles can be understood as leaving of the social order. Their styles can be described as a controlled chaos, in which people behave extraordinary.

These Japanese cultural identities, specific for Japanese popular culture styles, apocalypse and matsuri, might be able to explain the reason for the popularities of them. However, as Martinez emphasizes, it must be taken into consideration that while popular culture is part of the domain of the myth that reflect and reinforce the values of a society, when it travels abroad, it becomes part of the other cultures. Consumers can consume icons differently in different cultural context, i.e. “domestication”.102 For example, Akira (a Japanese anime) can be read differently by different spectators103 and uniform styles can be understood differently and worn for different reasons. Martinez argues that the audience is impossible to be pinned down and generalized, if it is done, it must be armed with empirical data.104

5.1.2 Who Are the Anime and Manga Fans?

Napier discuss about the anime and manga fans’ profiles. According to her, when she started to research about anime fans in the mid-1990s, it was fairly easy to categorize them. The majority of anime fans were male and they were in the science- or technology-related field. According to Napier, less than a decade later, the composition of anime fandom has changed enormously. The most obvious development has been the increase of younger fans and the enormous rise in female fandom. Probably the manga-for-girls have contributed to the rise of female fandom. Older fans also began having children and taking them to conventions with them, which increasingly provided family-friendly activities.105

Napier also provides three specific anime and manga fans’ portraits: Mark who is a physicist at the University of Texas and one of the older anime fans, Maya who is a portrait of an adolescent girl fan and Saman who is a typical Manhattan teenager, except his enthusiasm for anime and video games. As we can see from these example portraits, it is impossible to describe a “typical” anime fan

105 Napier, From Impressionism to Anime, 138-139.
with the explosion in fandom and the evolution of age and sex.\textsuperscript{106}

The range of anime and manga fans is wide and growing, and there seems to be a range of motivation for the fans to get involved with anime and manga culture. Napier emphasizes that fans are the people who are not afraid of different cultures and actively seek to engage with them. As Napier suggested, their inclination is estimated to be rubbing off into the mainstream culture and their impacts has been a profound one on an individual and a country-wide scale.\textsuperscript{107}

The “Otaku” would represent Napier’s description of an old stereotype of the fans as an outsider who sits in his or her room communing only with the fan objects.\textsuperscript{108} Eng have researched about an Otaku subcategory of consumers who have specialized tastes and buying patterns. An anime otaku, for example, who would know the name of every animator who worked on his or her favorite cartoon maintains a database cataloging every piece of merchandise associated with that cartoon. He or she then tends to buy only the more rare items to add to his or her already impressive collection of goods etc.\textsuperscript{109}

Some considered the otaku to be simply the Japanese version of nerd and geek cultures. However, the otaku have also been portrayed as an extreme kind of geek.\textsuperscript{110} For the otaku, the value of an object is not defined by mainstream interests, but by their own subcultural community’s secret knowledge, norms, and underground economy. Beyond mere consumption, the otaku are said to “change, manipulate, and subvert ready-made products”.\textsuperscript{111}

Although the image of the otaku, as a stereotype of the anime fans as outsiders, is changed and the range of fans has grown widely, some of the Japanese popular culture fans’ consumption pattern still remains similar with the otaku’s way. They create their own costumes for cosplay at conventions or order them from niche online stores. They watch anime, some of which are rare in market. Their knowledge of anime and manga that is hard to get remain as one form of membership sign.\textsuperscript{112} These suggest that even though the range of participants became wide, their special way of consumption still remains.

In early 2002, the fashion otaku appeared in a New York Times Magazine article on the burgeoning Japanese fashion world. Another recent New Yorker article also cites John Jay and gives

\textsuperscript{106} Napier, \textit{From Impressionism to Anime}, 142-147.
\textsuperscript{107} Napier, \textit{From Impressionism to Anime}, 147-148.
\textsuperscript{108} Napier, \textit{From Impressionism to Anime}, 147.
\textsuperscript{110} Eng, “Otak-who?,” 10.
\textsuperscript{111} Eng, “Otak-who?,” 12.
\textsuperscript{112} Davis, “Japanese Animation in America and its Fans,” 72-73.
its own definition of otaku including the fashion otaku.\footnote{Eng, “Otak-who?,” 21.} The fashion otaku in this article are presented as a new type of consumers, whose obsessive tendencies can be capitalized upon by those who control the means of production.\footnote{Eng, “Otak-who?,” 21.} This depiction of otaku as ultra-trendy heavy spenders on fashion\footnote{Eng, “Otak-who?,” 21.} clearly shows that Japanese popular culture style fans keep the otaku’s consumption habit, which is not market driven but instead may be able to control the means of production.

5.1.3 Gender Roles in Japanese Comic Books

In the following, Tsurumi discusses about gender roles in manga. Since the gender roles depicted in manga may have some influence to non-Japanese readers as well, it is important to take it into consideration.

Tsurumi argues that manga may be reliable indicators of social values and norms in Japan, serving a role similar to that of the popular culture media of television or magazines in many countries. According to her, after all, comics aren’t part of the real world; they belong to the realm of the fantastic. However, while most of us do not believe that Superman or Astro Boy really roam the skies, comics may have something to say about the world we live in and the roles we are expected to play in that world. Tsurumi discuss that manga is a major source of entertainment in Japan, read by people of every age group and class. A 1987 survey found that 69 percent of the Japanese high school students read manga, and in 1974 it was reported that Japanese white-collar workers spent 15 percent, and blue-collar workers 28 percent, of their free time reading comics. Tsurumi emphasizes that the prevalence and popularity of manga in Japan suggest that, in that country in particular, comics may indeed be reliable indicators of social values and norms, serving a role similar to that of the popular culture media of television or magazines in many countries.\footnote{Maia Tsurumi, “Gender Roles and Girls’ Comics in Japan,” in Japan Pop! – Inside the World of Japanese Popular Culture, ed. Timothy J. Craig (New York: East Gate, 2000), 171.}

By looking at Yukan Club, a popular manga series by female manga artist Yukari Ichijo, Tsurumi tried to ascertain what kind of values or message is being communicated to the young Japanese women who read this comic. Yukan Club, primarily geared toward high-school aged girls, ran successfully in the manga magazine Ribbon Original from 1982 to 1992. It has since been published in paperback form.\footnote{Tsurumi, “Gender Roles and Girls’ Comics in Japan,” 172.}

Tsurumi argues that in the series, the similarities between people of opposite sex are
depicted. The masculine–feminine crossing over is found in the characters of Bido and Yuri. Bido is a typical bishounen (beautiful boy) who is portrayed differently from the other two male characters. In fact, what is applicable to the women in the stories is often applicable to him. He prides himself on his looks and is a playboy. On the other hand, Yuri is the daughter of one of the richest men in Japan whose specialties are athletics, martial arts, and eating, while academics and elegance are clearly her weak points. Similarities between Yuri and the two other masculine boys and between Bido and the two more feminine girls help blur cultural distinctions between men and women.118

According to Tsurumi, however mixed the messages in Yukan Club may be about the general characteristics attributed to women, if one compares the evil woman with the good women in these stories, what emerge at first are some rather ugly stereotypes. Evil women tend to be unattractive, uncouth, and career-oriented. Good women are usually attractive, refined, and committed to their families. But Tsurumi emphasizes that when one looks further, one sees that these stereotypes are tempered with uncertainty. Beautiful villainesses are also found, as are homely heroines. Many of the “good” women have their own careers and accomplishments, and both the “good” and the “bad” types are represented by women who are independent and are physically and psychologically strong.119

On the other hand with women in the series, according to Tsurumi, a brief look at how the men in Yukan Club are depicted shows strong, careerist, goal-oriented males on the surface. As mentioned earlier, Bido is an exception to this. The status of the boys within the club is generally somewhat higher than that of the girls in terms of “cool” and knowingness. But Tsurumi emphasizes that when they are examined closely, they turned out to be not so strong psychologically; all men can be manipulated by their children or wives.120 One male character, Seishiro who shows the male standard gender archetype, is less popular than other characters and is sometimes viewed by others as a rather cold person.121

In view of all of this, Tsurumi argues that it seems safe to say that a distinct dichotomy between female and male is not seen in Yukan Club. Both female and male characters that exhibit traits traditionally thought of as belonging to the opposite sex (e.g. Yuri and Bido) are found, and the club members who most closely resemble a standard gender archetype (e.g. Seishiro) are not necessarily the most popular characters, nor the intended role models for the audience. In fact, it is

120 Tsurumi, “Gender Roles and Girls’ Comics in Japan,” 181.
121 Tsurumi, “Gender Roles and Girls’ Comics in Japan,” 182.
Yuri, a character with a more confusing gender, who comes across as the most human and the easiest for many readers to identify with.\textsuperscript{122} Thus, one can say that the characters in Yukan Club are not limited to narrow models of masculinity and femininity. Tsurumi argues that if there is any message for the reader concerning how men and women should be, it is that there are many ways for an individual to feel and behave, and that adherence to traditional gender stereotypes is not prerequisite for being an accepted, liked, and valuable member of society.\textsuperscript{123}

5.1.4 Cult of Cuteness in Japanese Popular Culture

Cuteness is one of the most significant aspects of Japanese popular culture. Media dealing with Japanese popular culture focus on the aspect of "cuteness" remarkably.

MSN World Business online reported in a column on June 2006, “Japanese culture is becoming a cult of cute”, that these days, Japan is busy exporting the epitome of cute and that cute-worship is gaining overseas acceptance. Cute is rapidly becoming Japan’s global image.\textsuperscript{124} Moreover, in November 2008, MSN World Business online published another column about Japanese popular culture, including the focused topic of cuteness.\textsuperscript{125}

The New York Times column of style is mentioning about cuteness as well. According to Spindler, every hipster who goes to Tokyo comes back learns two words: kawaii, which means “cute” and otaku, which means “obsessive”.\textsuperscript{126}

From the semiological perspective, McVeigh discussed cuteness as a key symbol in Japanese society. According to him, “cuteness” is not unique to Japan and can be found in any other society. However, McVeigh argues that in Japan, cuteness is a much more powerful theme, permeating numerous spheres of Japanese daily life. Cuteness is not just a fad in the fashion cycle of Japanese popular culture, but it is a “standard” aesthetic of everyday life.\textsuperscript{127}

McVeigh introduced two basic principles of cuteness semantically. First is a feature of an infant, such as wide forehead, small chin, big eyes, low nose, small lips and white skin. The second is an ability to arouse the protective instinct in others, which is accompanied by expressing

\textsuperscript{122} Tsurumi, “Gender Roles and Girls’ Comics in Japan,” 182.
\textsuperscript{123} Tsurumi, “Gender Roles and Girls’ Comics in Japan,” 185.
The key concept of cuteness is powerless, controlled, weakness, femininity, cheerfulness, and youthfulness. This concept is an axis around which the other concepts revolve.\(^{129}\) The ideological aspects of cuteness are allowed to be generalized across different situations and semantic domains, e.g. infants-young, girls-women.

McVeigh suggests that the consumption of cuteness is a form of “resistance”, a daily aesthetic that counters the dominant “male” productivity ideology of standardization, order, control rationality, impersonality and labor in Japan.\(^{130}\) Indeed, cute images are usually associated with women and leisure, but cuteness is not restricted to this group. Young men are occasionally spotted wearing something cute. Nor is it very unusual to see truck drivers with their own collection of stuffed animals, carefully positioned on the dashboards of their huge trucks. Both genders’ use of cuteness indicates its ambiguous and multivocal nature in Japan.\(^{131}\)

McVeigh also argues that cuteness is explained as a form of escape from the real world or at least from the high-pressure social world of Japan. Cuteness is a type of “fantasy” and a way of forgetting about the unpleasant things in everyday life. Certainly Japanese society deserves an occasional dose of fantasy because in Japanese society, bureaucratizing forces of statism and corporate culture are difficult to ignore. In the society, a strictly regulated, controlled, and highly competitive educational system decides one’s fate, e.g. where passing through life is a continuous series of exam preparations, where death from overwork is reportedly on the rise etc. Cuteness sweetens social existence and makes it more spontaneous, lighthearted and intimate.\(^{132}\)

McVeigh’s argument about the reason for existing cuteness cannot explain the expansion of cuteness in other cultural contexts, in which gender differences are moderate and social pressures are lower than in the Japanese society. Another motivation for cuteness needs to be investigated in other cultural contexts.

Napier argues that cuteness may seem particularly attractive in a world that appears increasingly chaotic and dark.\(^{133}\) Napier defines that generally cute characters and toys are small, colorful, and inexpensive, leading themselves to the collecting impulse. She suggests that collecting can be a means of comforting fantasiescape, separate from the demands and complexities of modern life. Then cuteness is particularly appealing in the new millennium culture.\(^{134}\)

\(^{128}\) McVeigh, *Wearing Ideology*, 139.
\(^{129}\) McVeigh, *Wearing Ideology*, 141-142.
\(^{133}\) Napier, *From Impressionism to Anime*, 129.
\(^{134}\) Napier, *From Impressionism to Anime*, 129.
Here, Napier explains the attraction of cuteness as a fantasy, which is similar to the Japanese use of cuteness for escaping from the real world. However, what motivate people to escape from the real world in other cultural contexts than Japan is not clear and needs to be investigated.

According to Napier, Japanese popular culture products can be seen as generic fantasy of cuteness instead of particularly “Japanese”. For example Hello Kitty's appeal may well be the fact that she does not appear to be particularly “Japanese”. Sanrio developed the character and chose London as her birthplace and “White” for her last name. Also, in one of the first and most popular Japanese computer games, Super Mario Brothers, its main characters appears to be and is named stereotypically Italian. However, these characters still have certain distinctively Japanese characteristics. Here, again, one of them is the attribute of cuteness. For example, although some of the scholars point out that American Pokemon distributors made an effort to have the Pokemon figures appear more “cool” than “cute”, it is certainly the case that the Pokemon figure Pikachu featured cute aspects, i.e. cuddly and nontthreatening, and was extremely popular among American boys and girls.

Here, the attraction of Japanese popular culture products abroad is discussed from the perspective of their “stateless” versus Japanese cultural identity again. Cuteness’s attraction, which is assumed here, is needed to be analyzed.

5.1.5 Criticism on Japanese Cultural Superiority over Other Asian Countries

Iwabuchi argues that the reason why the Japanese popular culture spread to other nations cannot be explained by Japanese cultural superiority.

According to Iwabuchi, cultural flows among East Asian countries are becoming active and Japanese popular culture plays a central role in the flow. It was in the 1990s that Japanese cultural presence became more prominent, when local industries in East Asia found commercial value in promoting Japanese/Asian popular culture in local markets. From animation and comic books to fashion, pop music and TV dramas. Japanese popular culture has been very well received in East and Southeast Asia.

Iwabuchi’s main criticism is that the recent spread of Japanese popular culture in East and

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135 Napier, From Impressionism to Anime, 129.
136 Napier, From Impressionism to Anime, 129-130.
137 Napier, From Impressionism to Anime, 130-131.
Southeast Asia is discussed nationally in Japan. For Japanese nationalists, the spread of Japanese popular culture to other Asian regions simply demonstrate Japanese cultural hegemony, and assume sameness in Japan and other Asian regions. The spread of Japanese popular culture in other parts of Asia easily lead to the “Asia yearning for Japan” idea by Japanese nationalists. The discourses are strongly haunted by the Japanese imperialism in the Asian region, the embrace of Japan’s postcolonial desire. These discourses fail to justify themselves in the transnational cultural flows, which assert equal cultural dialogue. Such nationalistic discourses are the result of not trying to confront the complexity of transnational popular culture flows. More serious analyses of transnational popular cultural flow, such as transnational productions, distribution, and consumptions, are needed.

Iwabuchi emphasizes that in the accelerating popular cultural flows within East and Southeast Asia, transnational encounters are produced in the ending of Japanese nationalist projects. The rise of Korean popular culture flow changed Japan’s position in the regional cultural flow. Non-Japanese Asian popular culture started to attract the Japanese audience and such transnational encounters promote more self-critical views for Japan. Furthermore, media consumption also encouraged audiences to contact Asian neighbors. Here, the idea of Japanese cultural superiority over other Asian nations is displaced. Japan needs to involve a redefinition of its own culture through association with other Asian modernities.

Similar to Iwabuchi’s argument in Asian context, in Western cultural context, the spread of Japanese popular culture cannot be explained by cultural superiority. As Iwabuchi stated, long time, non-Western countries have faced West and understood the distance from modernity, which means Western modernity was recognized as superior. However, now the Western countries that have been seen as an ideal model of modernity from Asian nations are accepting and partly following Japanese popular culture. This phenomenon is significant from the discourse of cultural modernization as cultural superiority. Here, as Iwabuchi suggested, a more specific analysis of transnational popular culture flow, such as transnational productions, distribution, and consumptions, is needed.

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5.1.6 Critical Reaction for Expansion of Japanese Popular Culture

There are critical reactions toward the popularity of Japanese anime and manga. Allen presents one of the evident critical reactions toward Japanese anime’s popularity, involving the *Pokemon* phenomenon in the USA. On November 3, 1999, Comedy Central screened “Chimpokomon”, an episode of the South Park animated television series. It is ostensibly a parody of the *Pokemon* phenomenon. *Pokemon*’s integrated merchandise and marketing strategy enabled it to become a popular, and often incomprehensible to adults, cultural icon of the 1990s in Japan, United States, and many other nations.\(^{144}\) The first *Pokemon* movie, when released by Warner Brothers in the United States in 1999, hit 3000 theaters simultaneously. It made more than 80 million dollar at the US Box Office and was backed up with the release of 10 million copies of the video. Sales of merchandising goods and *Pokemon* became a phenomenal marketing success in the United States.\(^ {145}\)

However, according to Allen, a group of critics set about challenging the value that *Pokemon* represent. These included religious leaders, who stated that *Pokemon* educated children in ungodly ways and that it offered alien and subversive messages to children. Other organizations also criticized the ethics of *Pokemon*, asserting that it portrayed foreign cultural values that would undermine the otherwise Christian, American values portrayed on television.\(^ {146}\)

The “Chimpokomon” episode of *South Park* surely influenced a far larger numbers of “middle Americans”. *South Park* is popular, and was the most watched cable TV program ever on US television in its first season in 1997.\(^ {147}\) Allen argues that the makers of *South Park* manipulated pre-existing stereotypes of Japan into slightly paranoid, orientalized, and ultimately emasculating images of Japan that place it in the role of the world’s leader in the promotion of global consumer ideology.\(^ {148}\)

According to Allen, there are some substantial themes that appear in the “Chimpokomon” episode. One of those is about commodity fetishism and fads. Their causes are apparently overseas and their solution is apparently American domestic. A second theme is about being an individual or being part of a group in which the authors mix the stereotypes of Japan and the United States.\(^ {149}\)

The episode does not only contain the criticisms of the *Pokemon* phenomenon, but also

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\(^{145}\) Allen, “*South Park* does Japan,” 39.

\(^{146}\) Allen, “*South Park* does Japan,” 39.

\(^{147}\) Allen, “*South Park* does Japan,” 36.

\(^{148}\) Allen, “*South Park* does Japan,” 37.

\(^{149}\) Allen, “*South Park* does Japan,” 43.
historical references, especially World War II. In the episode, the producer of Chimpokomon is planning to brainwash American children in revenge for World War II. Eventually these children participate in the Chimpoko camp, which are in fact Japanese military bases in United States where they are trained to fly jet fighters to attack Pearl Harbor.\(^{150}\) Also the episode includes physical body racial stereotypes, e.g. the size of the penis.

Allen emphasize that the impact of globalization is not only in Japanese popular culture products but also the same for American products, such as Disney movies or fast-food chains. The South Park episode only presents the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, but not the American attack on Hiroshima and Nagasaki with atomic bombs.\(^{151}\) Allen argues that the episode reveals a complex set of understandings, stereotypes, and misapprehensions.\(^{152}\)

This critical South Park episode clearly shows that the popularity of Japanese popular culture made American consumers anxious about the fading of their domestic culture. The episode’s significance is that they showed a stereotypical and historical image of Japan that is used to criticize the fads of Japanese products. On the one hand, there are young generations who are purely interested in and even love Japanese popular culture products, however, on the other hand, their popularity itself triggered a negative reaction.

Napier argues that Pokemon was not the only Japanese cultural phenomenon that generated mixed reactions in the West. Anime and manga also had to suffer certain negative connotations and stereotyping. For example, the degree of sexual content in both media produced strong responses. For Americans in particular, the idea of cartoons containing nudity and sexuality was genuinely hard to encompass, since both animation and comics have traditionally been seen as children’s entertainment and therefore “innocent”. Certainly at the beginning of the phenomenon, both anime and manga had to struggle with some extremely negative stereotyping. Much of that has changed, however, in the last decades. The public perceptions of what constitute art have begun to change, and Japanese imports have become more ubiquitous. Nevertheless, Napier emphasizes that the success of the two media was hardly assured. It is worth reiterating that manga and anime are two resolutely non-Western cultural products. The two media’s “cultural fragrances” that differed in many ways from domestic Western products include not only different approaches to design, action, and narratives but also different forms of representing gender and even value system.

\(^{150}\) Allen, “South Park does Japan,” 42.
\(^{151}\) Allen, “South Park does Japan,” 50.
\(^{152}\) Allen, “South Park does Japan,” 51.
5.1.7 Orientalism and Japonisme

Discussions about Orientalism or Japonisme are a vast area in cultural studies. In this section, the origin and some interesting examples of Orientalism and Japonisme discussed by Napier will be introduced in consideration of the attraction of Japanese art and culture toward Westerners.

According to Napier, Orientalism, one of the most discussed theories in cultural studies today, deals with the Western perception of Japan as a significant issue. Originally Orientalism was a relatively neutral word referring to Western scholarship and arts related to the East, especially in the Middle East, and somewhat more tangentially, South and East Asia. However, according to Said’s discussion in his book Orientalism, the conception is that the West’s relation to the non-Western Other (in his book, this Other or “Orient” is almost exclusively the Middle Eastern and/or Islamic civilization) has been built around unequal power relations in which the West was consistently dominant and East was consistently subordinate. It was during the time of Industrial Revolution and imperialism that the most radical changes in geopolitical relationship between the dominant West and submissive East was seen.

On the other hand, J.J. Clarke argues that while Orientalism has undoubtedly been in some respects a means by which the West has achieved a measure of control over the intellectual and religious traditions of the East, the growth of orientalism has in other respects been marked by a growth in mutuality, in dialogue, in knowledge, and in sympathy. We must take it into account that the East has achieved power over the West by becoming a counter to and critique of fundamental aspects of Western culture in Orientalism. As J.J. Clarke suggests, Orientalism cannot simply be identified with the ruling imperialist ideology, it represents a counter-movement which has tended to subvert rather than confirm the structures of imperial power in the Western context.

With regards to Japonisme, same with several other Oriental countries such as the Ottoman Empire, China, and India that had all long been a part of Western “fashion”, Japanese art and culture have appealed to Westerners and opened up new artistic directions in the nineteenth century Western context. The fascination with Japanese art and culture has been one of the most intense, most pervasive, most long lasting and most positive of any of the Western encounters with the non-Western Other. At its most intense, Japonisme (the cult of Japan) lasted about thirty years in the

153 Napier, From Impressionism to Anime, 6.
154 Napier, From Impressionism to Anime, 6.
155 Napier, From Impressionism to Anime, 7.
156 Napier, From Impressionism to Anime, 28.
157 Napier, From Impressionism to Anime, 8.
158 Napier, From Impressionism to Anime, 9.
159 Napier, From Impressionism to Anime, 27.
160 Napier, From Impressionism to Anime, 23.
nineteenth century, but Japanese art and culture, both high and popular, has remained an almost continuous influence from the nineteenth century to the present.\textsuperscript{161}

As an example in early Japonisme, Claude Monet, perhaps the most famous of the French Impressionists, and his fellow Impressionists who ultimately changed the fact of art, were strongly affected by Japanese art and culture. In Monet’s picture, \textit{La Japonaise} (first exhibited in 1876), his wife “try on” a Kimono (actually a kabuki actor’s robe) and paper fans with designs from Japanese woodblock prints are scattered on the floor.\textsuperscript{162} At the time this painting was shown, “modern life” was very new. It involved a variety of new activities, such as new transportsations, e.g. train and steamship, or new form of leisure activities, e.g. visiting international expositions and shopping in “department stores”.\textsuperscript{163} \textit{La Japonaise} was part of these changes caused by new modern life.

Monet’s portrait was representative of what was already a flood of European paintings depicting Japanese costumes or Japanese paraphernalia, such as James Tissot’s \textit{La Japonaise au bain} (1864), Edouard Manet’s \textit{Portrait of the Writer Emile Zola} (1867-68) and \textit{Olympia} (1863). The fans depicted in Monet’s \textit{La Japonaise}, indicates the fascination with inexpensive Japanese paraphernalia. According to Lionel Lambourne, “literally millions” of fans were made in Japan in the 1880s for the export market.\textsuperscript{164}

\textit{La Japonaise} and other Japonisme works were alien, an irruption from an unknown dreamlike culture, which would not only open up new artistic directions but would ultimately create a new way of approaching the world.\textsuperscript{165} At the time of its exhibition, the picture \textit{La Japonaise} was most likely viewed as representative of current fashion. This fashion was called “Japonisme”. Ultimately, the cult of Japan would spread from bohemian artists and intellectuals to upper class women wearing the latest kimono-inspired fashion, to the newly emerged middle class.\textsuperscript{166}

It cannot be said that Japan and its culture were always represented accurately or truthfully. Many of the most enthusiastic aficionados of Japan, such as the artist Vincent Van Gogh, never visited the country and derived their ideas about it from limited and sometimes mistaken information. Such information provided the aficionados just enough materials to create imaginary Japans that fit their particular needs. Thus, what we see in the nineteenth-century conception of Japan is a complex fantasy onto which Europeans and Americans projected a variety of desires, fears, dreams etc.

\textsuperscript{161} Napier, \textit{From Impressionism to Anime}, 27.
\textsuperscript{162} Napier, \textit{From Impressionism to Anime}, 21-22.
\textsuperscript{163} Napier, \textit{From Impressionism to Anime}, 22-23.
\textsuperscript{164} Napier, \textit{From Impressionism to Anime}, 24.
\textsuperscript{165} Napier, \textit{From Impressionism to Anime}, 23.
\textsuperscript{166} Napier, \textit{From Impressionism to Anime}, 23-24.
Europeans and Americans took pleasure in a fantasy of Japan.\textsuperscript{167}

While the nineteen-century Japonisme caused in the dramatical change of new modern life was a complex fantasy in which Westerners took pleasure of an unknown dreamlike culture, what is the flow of Japanese popular culture in twenty-first century globalization caused by? The nineteenth-century Japonisme is a relevant cultural phenomenon in consideration of Japanese popular culture flow in twenty-first century.

5.2 Subculture Discourse

5.2.1 Subcultural Activities Based on Class Differences

Cultural study researchers in the late 20th century, such as Cohen\textsuperscript{168}, Hebdige\textsuperscript{169}, Clarke et al.\textsuperscript{170}, have studied the cause of subculture and its collective activities as class-based identity expressions. Cohen argued that social categories such as age, sex, ethnics or classes control one’s situation, i.e. where we are located in the world, which include the physical setting and finite supply of time and energy. Such social categories control our frame of reference, which consists of the actor’s interests, preconceptions, stereotypes and values.\textsuperscript{171}

According to Hebdige, in the highly complex societies that function through a finely graded system of specialized labor, there are several ideologies representing the interest of specific groups and classes. Since some groups have more power to make the rules, organize meaning, produce and impose their definitions of the world, specific ideologies gain dominance, i.e. hegemony\textsuperscript{172}

Hebdige define that hegemony is a situation where certain social groups exert ‘total social authority’ over other subordinate groups. The power of the dominant classed appears both legitimate and natural.\textsuperscript{173} However, hegemony is not universal since it requires the consent of the dominant majority, which has to be won, reproduced and sustained; hegemony is moving equilibrium and can be deconstructed. The emergence of youth subculture means the breakdown of consensus of hegemony by challenging hegemony with their styles. By making ‘humble objects’ carry secret meaning, the styles of a subculture express its resistance to the order that guarantees their

\textsuperscript{167} Napier, \textit{From Impressionism to Anime}, 9-11.
\textsuperscript{169} Hebdige, \textit{Subculture}, 1999.
\textsuperscript{172} Hebdige, \textit{Subculture}, 14-15.
\textsuperscript{173} Hebdige, \textit{Subculture}, 15-16.
subordination. Style in a subculture is pregnant with significance that is against the majority. So that, by reading a subculture’s style, their inscribed message in code can be exposed.

Based on John Clarke et al, youth select goods and put them into their style through unconsciously transforming the goods from their given dominant, natural, meaning to another meaning and use. By combining things borrowed from one system into a different code, by modifying things used in other social groups, by intensify or exaggerate the given meaning etc., subculture construct meaningful style and appearance for itself, which can make members ‘homologous’, in other words symbolic objects are made to form an unity in the group.

Such assumptions, that our situation and frame of reference are controlled by social categories and cause subcultural activities, are similar with Bourdieu’s theory of the cultural capital in modern context because both theories are based on the difference of social categories and claim that the categories influence our action or ‘habitus’. As Bourdieu’s theory is challenged by recent empirical studies in contemporary American context, Cohen, Hebdige, and Clarke et al.’s, argument of categories’ influence on our action can be in question in contemporary context. It is questionable because advanced capitalist societies weakened the class differences largely by the variety of widely noted historical shifts, technological advances, diffusion of haute couture and mass markets etc.

However the class differences as a cause of subcultural style is in question, there is a growing popularity of one of the subcultural styles, i.e. transnational Japanese popular culture style, which remains to be favored by fans all over the world. If the class or social categorical differences cannot explain the cause of a subculture, there should be another cause for it. It is important to analyze if there is another cause for subcultures existing or if subcultural activities still remains as a result of social categorical differences.

5.2.2 Collective or Individual Subcultural Activity

In contemporary theory of youth subculture, it is discussed that subcultural styles are choices that differentiate themselves from other individuals and not depending on social categorical difference. The youth can choose products and images brought by the expansion of globalization and

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174 Hebdige, Subculture, 17-18.
175 Hebdige, Subculture, 18-19.
177 Clarke et al., “Subcultures, Cultures and Class,” 110.
construct their identities. The identity project is choice in a reflexive process, which is made available by the local materialization of globalization. Young consumers’ identity base is changing from group affiliation, such as subcultures, to individuality.\textsuperscript{181} Especially in the urban youth’s identity construction, Kjeldgaard argues, the individual uniqueness and authenticity was a core theme. Market-mediated objects enter into discourse of individual authenticity, personal characteristics, values, and virtues, which can be reflected directly in consumption.\textsuperscript{182} Individual identity operates as a key structure of a common difference for youth.\textsuperscript{183}

This individuality in modern context is also discussed by Holt as originality and authenticity. According to him, the pursuit of individual style is an issue only for people who belong to high cultural capitals (HCCs). By them, originality and authenticity are highly valued marks of distinction in their social milieu. People belonging to the low cultural capitals (LCCs), on the other hand, pursue lifestyles in a less individuated manner. These ultimate differences are a potent cultural cue distinguishing HCCs from LCCs.\textsuperscript{184} Holt emphasizes that in modern context, individual style is not merely caused by the collective activity based on class differences, rather by non-collective activity, individualization, HCCs differentiate themselves from LCCs by individualizing activities. The class differentiation through subculture as a choice of style still exist but is not directly expressed by collective activity.

However, there is an apparent contradiction between individual freedom and group affiliation in contemporary subcultural discourse.\textsuperscript{185} Muggleton discusses that while style is often a group phenomenon, it is also an individual matter. The issue of group versus individual analysis depends on the detail with which lifestyles are classified. The differences that exist within generally similar goods allow consumers to maintain their individuality, yet still be socially accepted and “fit in” within the wider peer group. Youth consumers are aware of the similarity and predictability of fashion, while at the same time seeing their purchases as the expression of a personal and individual choice.\textsuperscript{186} That is to say, transnational Japanese popular culture style fans’ perception of their individuality and authenticity would be interesting to investigate, because their uniqueness compared with conventional Swedish fashion is distinct and their group-oriented activities such as conventions are remarkable at the same time.

\textsuperscript{182} Kjeldgaard and Askegaard, “The Glocalization of Youth Culture,” 237.  
\textsuperscript{183} Kjeldgaard and Askegaard, “The Glocalization of Youth Culture,” 239- 240.  
\textsuperscript{184} Holt, “Does Cultural Capital Structure American Consumption?” 21.  
\textsuperscript{185} Muggleton, \textit{Inside Subculture}, 60.  
\textsuperscript{186} Muggleton, \textit{Inside Subculture}, 66.
5.2.3 Available Choice of Styles

Kjeldgaard’s research found that the range of choices available to choose from to express self-identity is fundamental for both center and periphery young consumers, but expressed differently because of the center-periphery structures. Both center and periphery young consumers hope to have a variety of choices from which they can choose appropriate styles to fit in their self-identity. The wide ranges of style choices are important to express identity for modern consumers.187

This wide range of style choices is described as the image of Tokyo in New York Time’s online column of style. The typical image of Tokyo as a capital of fashion can be found in a column from February 2002.188 From abroad, Tokyo was idealized by its image as the international capital of fashion in which large varieties of choices are available and people’s change of fashion is constant. Even Tokyo’s fashion is imagined as without politics behind it and just the superficial appearances of “kawaii” dominate fashion.189 Tokyo precisely represents the postmodern pastiche of fashion, the pluralism or anarchy of fashion, which symbolize the compulsory confusion of styles, in which all development and history are lost.190 This ideal in the image of Tokyo is exactly the idea presented as a “carnival of signs” or a mass of “free-floating signifiers” in postmodern consumer culture. Consumer’s experiences are momentary. There is no continuous self-identity so that consumers live in multiple roles and switch their identity easily.191

Even in the range of style choices available to choose from for individuals, as Kjeldgaard emphasizes, the elements of styles are still homological structures, which are not just a random “carnival of signs” or a mass of “free-floating signifiers”. Style and ideology are decoupled, but switching the style does not necessarily mean random identity switching. Instead, the various styles are consumed as a coherent individualized identity.192 Each style carry signified meaning, self-identity, and each individual is significantly aware of them and fascinated to choose its ideal styles.

According to Kjeldgaard, we can detect the reason for this young consumers’ desire for a


188 Spindler, “Do You Otaku?”

189 Spindler, “Do You Otaku?”


191 Kjeldgaard, “The meaning of style?” 73.

192 Kjeldgaard, “The meaning of style?” 81.
wide range of style choices through the style switching activity of center youth. Style is understood as a means of expression of various aspects of their self-identity. Style switching is an opportunity to experiment with other identities through role switching. The style switching practice is fun and play for the modern youth and involves the difficult identity transition since they involve breaking with a sense of a continuous self. Through the switching they can experiment with their identity freely, borrowing only the aesthetic elements from the subcultural style without necessarily buying into the values and total homologies that is originally expressed.

To understand modern youths’ identity experiment with other plural identities, close analysis of Japanese popular culture styles that came from Tokyo, the international capital of fashion, would be helpful.

5.3 Identity Discourse

5.3.1 Identity Ambivalence

The following will introduce Davis’ theory, which discusses fundamental human traits of identity in terms of ambivalence and its relation to dresses.

Davis argues that the human condition is in inherently ambivalent, i.e. subject to those “contradictory emotional or psychological attitudes and continual oscillation”. According to Davis, some contemporary authors see it as the essential psychic grounding on which historically derived social and cultural contradictions come to be built. Others consider the origin of the ambivalence as a fundamental biologically determined human condition. For Simmel, the idea of ambivalence lies at the very heart of his sociology of social forms and informs his analysis of the modern culture.

Aside from whether ambivalence is an existential given or not, Davis argues, there are more interesting questions: what are humans ambivalent about? why are they more ambivalent about some things than others? It is not only about biological or individual personality. For ambivalence is ambivalence about something, and that something is also invariably a social object: some artifact, thought, belief, image, practice, goal, etc., invested with meaning. That is to say, the something is that we can communicate via gestures, expressions, ornaments, emblems, signs and language.

Davis argues that of the infinitude of social objects about which a person can feel

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193 Kjeldgaard, “The meaning of style?” 75.
194 Kjeldgaard, “The meaning of style?” 77.
195 Kjeldgaard, “The meaning of style?” 78.
197 Davis, Fashion, Culture, and Identity, 23.
198 Davis, Fashion, Culture, and Identity, 24.
ambivalence, the most prevalent and salient is the self. Because of our ability to take the self as an object, a multivoiced inner dialogue occurs. Such multivoiced inner dialogues evaluate some action, thought, plan, or desire of the self. The more complex the society from which the voice includes the inner dialogue, the more ambivalence will occur. Reflecting different sentiment, standards, and values from the diverse cultural experiences to which the self has been exposed, the inner voices are likely to clash.  

Davis argues that it can be said that in very large part of our identities – our sense of who and what we are – take shape in terms of how we balance and attempt to resolve the ambivalences to which our natures, our times, and our culture make us heir. Clothing comes to share in the work of ambivalence management as much as does any other self-communicative device at our disposal: our voices, body postures and facial expressions and the material objects we surround ourselves with. Davis emphasizes that obviously, because clothing (along with cosmetics and coiffure) frames much of what is most closely attached to the corporeal self, it naturally acquires a special capacity to “say things” about the self. Then dress comes easily to serve as a kind of visual metaphor for identity.

This human condition of identity ambivalence and self-communicative device of fashion are important theoretical concepts to take into consideration in the research of identity and styles.

5.3.2 Japanese Popular Culture Convention and Cosplay

Napier argues that at the most fundamental level, the motivation for the fans to participate in conventions is to enjoy a fantasy world. It is a liminal world which intersects with reality at a certain moment. In it, participants can throw off the burdens, responsibilities and roles of ordinary life by donning liminal masquerade. This masquerade simply means the chance to assume a different identity with one’s weekdays self. She argues that this identity is even truer for some fans, as it is one based on feelings of love and pleasure that are not accepted in the outside world.

This fantasy world is also described in a Japanese anime and manga convention analysis by Davis. With a large number of anime and manga fans together, many fans act more untamed and unrestrained than usual, because they feel that for this one time and place, they are the majority and can act as they want. The costumes they wear at the convention are one of their membership signs
that allow them to explore other identities, limited only for the weekend.\textsuperscript{205} Knowledge about anime and manga is one of the other forms of membership signs.\textsuperscript{206}

In terms of identity, Napier discuss about cosplay in the convention. According to her, cosplay provides an almost literal example of “flow” as the players parade up and down through the convention halls, stopping for other fans to take their photo in dynamic poses, and then moving back to join the river of players and fans.\textsuperscript{207} However, the cosplay is more than simply dressing up. The pleasures of cosplay are similar with the one in the childhood when “dressing up”, which can be observed in Halloween, the ultimate American fantasy.\textsuperscript{208} They transform to become others for a while and change one’s identity.\textsuperscript{209}

Cosplay would have very much to do with fans identity narratives in terms of transformation of self and fantasy. It is interesting to investigate such cosplay fans with empirical study.

### 5.3.3 Fateful Decision and Refuge

According to Giddens, regardless of the lack of psychological support and sense of security in modernity (discussed in chapter 3), individuals are supposed to make decisions, from small daily decision of lifestyle choices to important fateful decisions in contemporary context. Life planning requires not only small daily lifestyle decisions for individuals but also important decision making for one’s life, i.e. fateful decisions.

Giddens argues that fateful circumstances are particularly consequential for individuals, which include the undesired outcomes, i.e. high consequential risk, that affect people in potentially life-threatening ways. Fateful moments are those when individuals are called on to take decisions that are consequential for their future lives, e.g. decide to get married, or decide to give up one job in favor of another etc.\textsuperscript{210} Fateful moments stand in a particular relation to risk, in other words, they are threatening for protective cocoon which defend the individual’s ontological security.\textsuperscript{211}

The fateful decision-making in modernity is not particular in modern context since it exists as the same in pre-contemporary context. However, because of the lack of psychological support and a sense of security in modern dynamism and increased choices, the fateful decision-making is surely getting harder than in pre-contemporary context.

\textsuperscript{205} Davis, “Japanese Animation in America and its Fans,” 71.
\textsuperscript{206} Davis, “Japanese Animation in America and its Fans,” 73-75, 78-81.
\textsuperscript{207} Napier, \textit{From Impressionism to Anime}, 161.
\textsuperscript{208} Napier, \textit{From Impressionism to Anime}, 161.
\textsuperscript{209} Napier, \textit{From Impressionism to Anime}, 161.
\textsuperscript{210} Giddens, \textit{Modernity and Self-Identity}, 112-113.
\textsuperscript{211} Giddens, \textit{Modernity and Self-Identity}, 113-114.
This modern identity situation may explain the reason for the need of taking refuge in an imagined world, fantasy, for some youth. As presented in previous chapters, the attraction of Japanese popular culture products and the conventions are often portrayed as a fantasy space. By studying the attraction of Japanese popular culture styles, it will be possible to describe the modern individuals’ confronting difficulties of identity construction.
6 Results and Discussion

In this chapter, findings from the five interviews will be analyzed with the results from the literature study in mind. Data will be presented in three topics: cultural flows in globalization, identity narratives, and cultural translation and cultural level. Through these three topics, a macro view of Japanese popular culture flows globally, a micro view of local people’s life experiences, and the transition of the Japanese popular culture from one place to another can be clearly explained.

6.1 Cultural Flows in Globalization

In the following, the flow of Japanese popular culture will be discussed in terms of globalization. As a result of globalization, cultural forms such as capital, people, commodities, images, and ideas are unhinged from particular localities and consequently, as Inda and Rosaldo argue, became highly mobile and deterritorialized. Japanese popular culture is one of the examples of such deterritorialized culture that flows the globe. Japanese popular culture that originated in Japan flows beyond the national borders and reach Sweden. The following section will introduce the trigger for Japanese popular culture flows in Swedish fans, the flow of Japanese popular culture products in Sweden, and the influence internet has had over the flow of Japanese popular culture in Sweden.

6.1.1 Trigger of Japanese Popular Cultural Styles Expansion

Anime and manga are found as one of the most influential triggers for the expansion of Japanese popular culture. All of the five respondents mentioned anime and manga as their first contact with Japan. The influence appears very strong for all the respondents. When they could not find manga or anime in Swedish, they read or watched it not in Swedish, but in English. One respondent used the expression that “everyone was hooked” by the attraction of manga and anime. Similar to this expression, several respondents implied that reading manga and watching anime are preferred by a lot of people and are normal and common for them. Different with the images of Otaku, the extreme kind of geek discussed by Eng, anime and manga appeared as one of the common mainstream cultures for the Swedish respondents. As Napier suggests, the inclinations toward anime and manga have been rubbing off into the mainstream culture and have become

214 Napier, From Impressionism to Anime, 147-148.
ubiquitous for all the respondents in Swedish context. Below, Martin and Veronica’s comments clearly show how popular anime and manga is for them and how common it is to watch anime and read manga for them. The imported cultural forms are penetrated into natives’ life experiences.

<Martin>

M (Martin): Manga came to Sweden like around ten years ago, when I was in junior high school, I started to buy Dragon Ball. I was never really into it. I was watching *Sailormoon* though when I was younger. Everyone did, you know. I was never into it but time went by, and going on and on, and I started to download anime on internet, around 2004 or 2005. So I just gave in, like “OK, I will just watch anime because I wanna hang out with them”

K (Interviewer): Was everyone watching?

M: My friends were watching. They were like, “Naruto, Naruto !”. Everyone was watching *Naruto*. Then I watched, then it was good. And I was watching *Beck* and *One Piece* as well. After that, I was hooked, you know. just like everyone else.

<Veronica>

K (interviewer): When did you get interested in Japan?

V (Veronica): I don’t know. Actually I like anime from when I cannot remember. I liked *Pokemon* and *Sailormoon* because everyone else liked them. Well, I liked them since I liked them but that’s the way I got into them because everyone in my class talked about it.

Martin and Veronica commented that everyone surrounding them watched anime and that is the reason why they got interested in anime and manga. Martin indicated that he started to watch anime because he wanted to keep the relation with his friends who were interested in anime and manga. For Martin and Veronica, it is common and usual to enjoy anime and manga among their friends. That is to say, anime and manga is a mainstream culture for them.

Some of the anime series mentioned in the interview have not been shown on Swedish TV. It is implied that fans downloaded anime and manga or watched them online. Here the influence of internet surely made a big impact as a trigger for many fans. Similar to Napier’s discussion about the internet being the single most important instrument in creating the anime fan “community”\(^{215}\), internet appeared as a crucial media that helped the respondents to find Japanese popular culture.

Starting from the interest in anime and manga, the respondents’ interest in Japan grows and they found their style influenced by Japanese popular culture. Anime and manga evoked the

\(^{215}\) Napier, *From Impressionism to Anime*, 136.
respondents’ interests in Japanese languages, Japanese popular music, or fashion etc. In the following, Lars’ comments show his first contact with manga and anime and how they inspire him to be interested in Japanese popular culture styles.

<Lars>

K (Interviewer): How did you find Japan?
L (Lars): My little brother told me that it is very fun and show me Dragon Ball’s first volume. And then I tried the movie of Dragon Ball and always found the new volumes. And I also read One Piece and so on. I think it pretty much thanks to the Swedish manga publishers because they had small learning Japanese pages in the Magazine. And they encouraged learning Japanese culture.

K: How did they encourage?
L: They had kept “-san” [Sir] or “-chan” [Miss] in Swedish manga. And I was like “What’s this?” then I naturally became interested in Japanese. Then I wanted to know what kind of language they are using. […]

K: So most of the influence for you came from magazine?
L: Yes. Manga and the small extra pages printed on the manga book showing like Japanese popular cultures.

K: What kind of popular culture they show on it?
L: Movies or music etc.
K: Are you also interested in them?
L: Yeah, when we watch anime, you could know intro music and ending music. Then you can search some related music. Then you could find a lot of Visual-kei [one kind of band style which can be translated as Visual-style]. That was the way I found Ayabie. They came to Sweden and I went to see them at their live. […]

L: [In Sweden,] of course they [Ayabie] are minority but they are interesting. That was an opportunity that I could realize that people could be pretty and guy.

K: Was it the time you start wearing the feminine style you have said?
L: Yes, around that time. I liked Goth when I was in elementary school, and when I became a high school student, I started to like Japanese popular culture. At that time, I wore pretty feminine styles.

K: What you mean by feminine style?
L: For example, I wore H&M’s unisex cloth which cuts are pretty feminine. And I wore hair clips. Since I saw some Japanese guys wearing hair clips.

Lars first found manga because of his brothers who liked it. Manga inspired Lars to be interested in anime, which sparked his interest in Japanese popular music. Through watching such music bands’ styles, Lars found Japanese popular culture styles he liked. Manga also made him interested in the Japanese language. Starting from the contact with Japanese manga and anime, Lars found several other Japanese popular culture forms.
Several respondents explained about why they like anime and manga in terms of “difference”. If the difference of manga and anime mentioned by the respondents is examined closely, it appears that there are two types of differences: the difference with Swedish cultural products and the difference with everyday reality.

Manga and anime’s differences with Swedish cultural products can be called Japanese cultural identity in Napier’s words. The difference is caused by fundamental differences in two cultures, the Swedish one and the Japanese one. Since anime and manga keeps the Japanese cultural identity, which is different from the Western cultural identity, in Polhems’ words, manga and anime’s cultural otherness have not been ground down and obliterated by globalization, they are instead appreciated by the respondents.

Another difference found in interviews is the difference with everyday reality. This difference can be called a stateless cultural identity in Napier’s word. Anime and manga offers other worlds, which are separated from the reality of present days. Such unreal imagination attracted some of the respondents. The following comments from Lars show the two differences, Japanese cultural identity and stateless cultural identity, which fans are attracted to.

<...>
Lars: I think the main reason why I was attracted by anime and manga is that it was something new and different from what I was used to. The stories were often basically the same as books and films I had seen but it was as if someone else was telling them in a different way. The characters, jokes and contexts were all new to me. Also, there was so much in anime and manga that compared to what I was used to was just really weird. Like Kame Sennin or Luffy's gomugomu [rubber] power, or Ranma turning into a girl etc. I have always liked various kinds of bizarre jokes. I think I took pride in being able to appreciate these things that many other just couldn't understand.

The element, characters, jokes and contexts are mentioned as differences by Lars. He felt that the story in anime and manga are similar to stories he have read or seen, but they are told in different ways. These differences are based on fundamental cultural differences between Sweden and Japan. Even though the stories the manga and anime deal with are similar to stories in Sweden, e.g. fighting, love or romance, adventure etc., the way characters experience their life or the way society works are fundamentally different because of Swedish and Japanese cultural differences. These

differences are for example different history, religion, language, competitive educational system and more. Such cultural otherness of manga and anime inspire and attracted Lars. That is to say, anime and manga keeps the Japanese cultural identity, which is different from the Swedish cultural identity and attracts non-Japanese fans.

Moreover, Lars mentioned that the various kinds of bizarre characters that cannot exist in reality are attractive, e.g. Kame Sennin (a womanizer old man who is a master of martial arts and carrying a turtle shell all the time), Luffy (a 17 years old boy pirate captain, who ate a devil rubber fruit and got a stretching body which he use for fighting) and Ranma (a 16 years old martial arts fighter who becomes female when he gets cold water on his body, but changes back with hot water). These kinds of unreal fantasies, stateless cultural identity in Napier’s words, which are funny and can make viewers laugh, are appreciated by Lars. These unreal fantasies are different with everyday reality and attract anime and manga fans who wish to take a pause from reality and enjoy alternative worlds.

The following comments from Veronica clearly show anime and manga’s stateless cultural identity, which attract her.

<Veronica>
K (interviewer): How do you think about the attraction of Manga? You said they are different.
V (Veronica): Yes, they are different. Just all the elements are different. Look at lot stuff from America, there are a lot of sex, drugs, and some murders to keep it exciting. It’s either it shows like movie for two hours or really long, like hundred episodes. But Anime, for example, or Asian drama, it’s so simple, so cute. The worst thing it can happen is an ex [-girlfriend] appears and then “oh no, will you choose me or her?!” When you had a bad day or just frustrated, you don’t have to turn on TV and see someone go on with drug addiction or something, but you can see someone trying to make him interested in her and being foolish, so just we can laugh, like “Oh, it’s sweet” and everything. It’s just different. When it comes to action, they have a way of making it funny, like One Piece. It cannot be really serious. You can start laughing because they are doing something stupid. While in America, where most of the things come from, they are trying to be funny, and you can be like “Yeah, it’s funny” but you cannot really laugh out loud. That’s the style. It’s also relaxing to look at TV or it’s nice to read Manga when it’s come to action because it’s hard to describe in a book.
K: I see.
V: It’s simple, cute and funny.

Veronica felt that unrealistic stupid things which are not serious in anime and manga attracts

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220 Napier, Anime: From Akira to Princess Mononoke, 25.
her since it makes her relaxed and laugh. While by watching American TV shows, she felt that the contents are more serious and realistic, which is not attractive for her, because they are the same with reality and thus do not make her relaxed. Foolish, funny and non-serious anime and manga fantasy worlds that are different with her everyday life is what attracted her to anime and manga. In other words, the anime and manga’s stateless cultural identity, unrealistic fantasy, attract fans in Swedish cultural contexts.

6.1.2 Flow of Japanese Popular Culture Products

In addition to the internet and some of the Swedish manga magazines as a source of information about Japanese popular culture in Sweden, some of the respondents mentioned several stores that distribute Japanese comic books and magazines in Stockholm. It is found that these stores are taking a key role as a special place where fans can get limited physical items. Originally these stores might have been started by Japanese immigrants targeting the Japanese immigrant customers, similar to other stores targeting immigrants from mostly Turkey, Middle East or India in the Botkyrka area, which is one of the ghettos in Stockholm discussed by Hannerz.221 According to Hannerz, around 27 percent of the population in the Botkyrka area is foreign born.222 Thus, the stores there would do business in the community of such immigrants. However, the Japanese book stores mentioned by the respondents in this study appear to be different with the other stores dealing with foreign merchandises in the Botkyrka area. Not only immigrants but Swedish native young customers visit the Japanese book stores. They sell English translated or Swedish translated manga, which are intended for Swedish customers. Apparently the Japanese manga and magazine are appreciated and consumed by Swedish natives. This is one flow of Japanese popular culture products in Sweden.

In addition to these stores doing business with Japanese popular culture products in Sweden, there is another flow of Japanese popular culture products: by consumers themselves. Four of five respondents have been to Japan and one respondent is planning to go there the (at the time of writing) coming summer. They travel to Japan, buy fashion items and bring them back to Sweden. They like to buy items in Japan because they believe that they can find their favorite items, which they cannot find in Sweden, there. As in Polhems’s argument, respondents travel to a particular country with particular mythical expectations of what they will find there. For them, the world has

222 Hannerz, Transnational Connections, 152.
not become a homogenous whole. They believe that a place continues to convey meaning and such mythical expectation influence their consumer choices.\textsuperscript{223} It appears, in Polhems word, that a country, Japan in this case, is a brand for them.\textsuperscript{224} Garments from Japan appeared as authentic for the respondents because their styles are originated in Japan. It appeared that there are almost no reasons for why the garments are attractive, except from their Japanese origin. The following short questions and answers from Martin and Veronica show how the respondents commented about their fashion items from Japan.

\textbf{<Martin>}

K (interviewer): Do you have any key word for your style? What specifically describe your style?

M (Martin): I like Shibuya-kei, [Shibuya-style] right. I think 109 [department store in Shibuya] is pretty cool because there you can get a lot of stuff, like fashionable things that you can find on the magazines. Also, Takeshita [name of a street] in Harajuku is pretty cool. It's not like I am following what everyone is wearing, but basically I go to these areas and I find something I really like I will buy it.

Martin used names of an area (Shibuya), a street (Takeshita) and a shop (109) to describe his style. His choice to use Japanese names of a specific area, shop, and street to describe his fashion style indicates that he admires that Japanese shopping area. The Shibuya area is important for Martin’s fashion style. He believes that in that area, he can find his favorite fashion items. In the interview, he proudly mentioned about his jacket he bought in 109. He went to the area and bought his favorite fashion items and brought them back. For Martin, Japan and the Shibuya area are brands that have an attractive value.

\textbf{<Veronica>}

K: Have you ever been to Japan?

V: No. But I am going to this summer. I will be there for five weeks.

[…]

K: Are you planning to shop a lot in Tokyo?

V: Yes. Well, I am not sure. I have never been in Tokyo yet but what I’ve seen, what it looks like in Harajuku, they actually have a lot of stores sells clothes for Oshare-kei, Visual-kei. I think it’s a lot easier to find stuff there.

\textsuperscript{223} Polhems, “What to wear in the global village,” 265.
\textsuperscript{224} Polhems, “What to wear in the global village,” 268.
Veronica is looking forward to visit Japan this coming summer and planning to shop fashion items there. She will travel to Tokyo with particular mythical expectations of what she will find there. She believes that she can find fashion items there, which cannot be found in Sweden. For her, the place, Tokyo, convey important meaning with a mythical expectation. These individuals, who are attracted by a national brand or mythical expectations of places, travel to Japan and bring products back to Sweden. This shows one flow of Japanese popular culture goods by individuals.

6.1.3 Influence of Internet to Popular Cultural Flows

As briefly mentioned in previous chapters, internet surely took a key role as a source of information for the respondents. Starting from enjoying anime and manga on internet, information about Japanese fashion brands, magazines or trends are all available online. Not only information, even fashion items from Japan are available in Sweden through internet. In Hannerz’ words, commodity flow and media flow do not belong to any particular place.225 Swedish people can live with the latest Japanese popular culture style even though they physically live in Sweden. In this sense, the boundary of Japanese popular culture is surely separated from places and it is transplanted over distance.

In the following, Bella’s comments illustrate the Japanese popular cultures’ products flow (Lolita dress) and media flow (magazines).

<Bella>

B (Bella): Sometimes, I also go to this site. […] They put magazine scans. I don’t know if it’s legal. But I try to look those.
K (interviewer): Oh! These are the latest magazines!
B: Yes, almost all latest. They have Scawaii [Japanese magazine] and they also have Happy Nuts [Japanese magazine] and Jelly [Japanese magazine]. So this is how I get my inspiration.
[…]
K: Why were you interested in Lolita? How did you become interested in it?
B: Let me see. I think it was my friend she found it somehow. Probably on the internet or something, I am not sure how she found it. But she showed me, you know Baby, The Stars Shine Bright, [Lolita brand] right? She showed me their home page. And I really fell in love with it.
[…]
K: Is there any place that you can get that kind of dress in Sweden?

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B: Yes, there is now. But before, there were not. So I order from the internet.

Bella keeps track of the latest Japanese Gyaru fashion by looking at fashion Magazine scans online. Her first contact with Lolita fashion was on an internet homepage as well. Even though Bella lives in Sweden, she can easily get Japanese fashion information online. Also, she has ordered Lolita dresses online. Bella bought Japanese products in Sweden. Japanese popular culture products (Lolita dress) and media (magazines) flowed from Japan to Sweden through internet. Internet surely helps such flows.

These media flows and products flows are not just transplanted in Swedish local context, but take root in local people’s life also through internet. In other words, internet does not only help to distribute Japanese popular culture products and information about it, but also helps to create and expand the Japanese popular culture community with local members. Internet helps communication between fans. As Inda and Rosaldo discuss, the imported foreign cultural forms are appropriated according to local conditions of reception.226 The Japanese popular culture forms are appropriated in local fans’ life through internet, creating a new community. Lillaboken, Tumblr, blogs and Facebook are mentioned by the respondents as their means of reaching their community.

Following below, Veronica and Bella’s comments show how these internet forums help creating their communities in which they can enjoy their favorite styles together.

<Veronica>
K (Interviewer): How did you get friend in conventions?
V (Veronica): First time, when I made new friend, it was on Lillaboken, the site I showed you. I think people found me on it and I started to know people. And I also found other cosplayers and started to write some comments to their pictures. And they responded me.
K: I see.
V: One of the pretty popular guy, he has a lot of friend. He thought I seemed nice and added me to his friend list and we started talking. In that way I met his friends at conventions. And I met their friends.

Veronica uses Lillaboken to share her cosplay photos online, which makes them reachable for a lot of other cosplay fans. They can make comments on each other’s photos online, which help fans to make friends. They make friends online and start meeting in conventions; Lillaboken helps to create a cosplay fan friend community.

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<Bella> 

B (Bella): I am following a lot of blogs. I am getting inspiration from a lot of foreign Gyaru and also Japanese Gyaru. I am always looking at different blogs. Just to keep up with fashion. So it’s great to look at blogs.

K (Interviewer): It’s interesting.

B: I also have a lot of foreign Gyaru following me. They are blogging about Gyaru as well. I also have some foreign Gyaru blogs I follow as well.

Bella uses online blogs to share information and her own photos with Japanese and foreign Gyaru. She follows Japanese and foreign Gyaru’s blog and comments on each other’s blogs. Through commenting, they became friends and have also met each other in real life. They also create Gyaru conventions or events. Blogs help to create Gyaru fans community.

6.2 Identity Narratives

In the following, the respondents’ identity narratives will be discussed. By focusing on three topics, individual uniqueness and group affiliation, dominant group pressure, and resistance to pressures, each respondent’s individual life experiences in Swedish social context can be clearly explained.

6.2.1 Individual Uniqueness and Group Affiliation

As Kjeldgaard argues, the individual uniqueness and authenticity appeared as a core theme for the respondents’ identity base.\(^{227}\) Japanese popular culture styles are used as a mean of individualization for the respondents. All respondents imply their styles are special and different from others, which are often called normal style or regular style, in Swedish context.

However, as Muggleton discussed, the issue of group versus individual analysis depends on the detail with which lifestyles are classified. There are different degrees of individual uniqueness and group affiliation.\(^{228}\) The following presents two different degrees of individual uniqueness and group affiliation in the two respondents, Martin and Bella. First, Martin’s comments below clearly indicate his preference to be different with “normal people” and stand out by wearing his Gyaruo style.


\(^{228}\) Muggleton, Inside Subculture, 66.
<Martin>

K (Interviewer): Is it important for you to be unique?
M (Martin): Yes, I like to be a leader. If I were in the crowd and I want to stand out.
K: You said there are a lot of people who have similar interest with you. Do you feel close to them?
M: They didn’t know anything and they watched some movies then like, “Wow, what is Gyaru fashion?”
They didn’t know anything in 90s and they have never been to Japan. They have to have someone to look up to. Like, Becca [Martin’s friend] is a good role model. She is pretty famous. You can find on facebook there are couples of people who call themselves Gyaru. That’s nothing wrong that you find something you like and wanna be. It’s like me, I was taught by magazines. I was copying someone. If they wanna learn how to be a Gaijin [foreign] Gyaru, they need to have a role model. Right? Now there is a few who is representing. So if you have people who are standing on top, you will get more soldiers.
K: Did you get soldiers?
M: I wanna bring up more kids. Of course. Like, Davy [Martin’s friend], you saw, he just started.
K: Did you teach him?
M: Yes.
K: I see. So you really like to be in attention.
M: Yes, I guess so.

For Martin, his style is a means to make him unique and different from the other people in the crowd. On the other hand, he also mentioned his penchant for imitating Gyaru styles in Japanese magazine. Also he likes to make other people in Sweden to wear Gyaru style and follow his style. He uses the word “soldiers” to describe other fans which indicates that he is the leader in the hierarchical system. As Muggleton’s discussion that styles are both individual and a group phenomenon, Martin keeps his individual authenticity in Swedish local as a leader of Gyaru style and keeps his group affiliation in Japanese Gyaru styles. He is unique and in attention in Sweden, at the same time, fits in Japanese Gyaru group and creates Gyaru followers in Sweden. His individual uniqueness is in local context and his group affiliation is both in remote and local.

Second, in the following Bella’s comments imply her strong preference for local group membership even though she wears unique and different styles in local cultural context.

<Bella>

K (Interviewer): How do you feel about them [regular people]? Did you say it’s a bit boring earlier?

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229 Muggleton, Inside Subculture, 66.
B (Bella): Yes. I think it’s a bit boring but if they want to wear, I don’t think it’s wrong. But I like when people wear different styles and they want to wear their own styles. And I love look different kind of styles. I think it’s nice if there is a variety. That’s why I really like being in Tokyo, because you can just look at all the people, everyone has their own styles. Even if I wouldn’t wear the girl is wearing, I think it’s nice that you can get inspired and there are so many different styles. I really like that.

K: I see.

B: That’s one thing I don’t like about Sweden. People wear the same thing I think, most of the people. There is no variety.

[...]

K: I have heard about a Gyaru convention in Finland.

B: Yes, they had it in November, I think. And I went there. It was nice.

[...]

B: There were a lot of gals there [at the convention]. So it was really nice.

[...]

B: We have a [online] Swedish Gyaru community.

K: Oh, I didn’t know that.

B: It’s not so big. Me and my friend started. It doesn’t look that good but we can share or inspire each other. Like if you want to ask, “What hair product are you using?” or “Do you know about this style?” or something like that. We can ask each other and give a few tips. So I think it’s really nice to have this community.

[...]

B: Now, we are 305 people [in the community].

K: Oh, that’s a lot.

B: It’s growing. I am very happy. We are getting bigger.

K: I see.

B: I think it’s first weekend in March, there will be big meeting in Norway. So I am going there because my Gyaru friend arranged this. So they are coming, some Swedish Gyaru, Finish Gyaru or from different countries.

Bella comments that she likes people’s different styles, individual authenticity, and show negative feelings, e.g. boring, toward regular styles. Her image of affluent varieties of styles in Tokyo is same with the typical image of Tokyo reported by media.²³⁰ Bella commented that she likes to enjoy a variety of different Gyaru styles, from cool Gyaru styles to cute Gyaru styles. That is to say, she likes to enjoy a variety of styles by wearing or observing. At the same time, she mentioned that she does not like to “stick out” too much in Swedish cultural context. Also she showed her

²³⁰ Spindler, “Do You Otaku?”
affirmative feeling toward Gyaru conventions and communities. It can be assumed that she is attracted by style switching and experiment with the identity in Gyaru style, rather than the individual authenticity of the style by wearing Gyaru style. For her, Gyaru style itself contains both individual uniqueness and group affiliation at the same time. In other words, the variety of different styles that exist within the Gyaru style allow Bella to maintain her individuality, yet still be accepted and “fit within” the Gyaru groups all over the world.\textsuperscript{231}

6.2.2 Dominant Group Pressure

Several respondents feel that there is a pressure to fit into the dominant styles. The following comments from Bella imply that she feels a pressure to not wear too much and be similar to others to not stick out. Also, Veronica’s comments below shows that her sister and her friends experienced pressure to fit into dominant group’s style, otherwise they would get bullied and herself felt lonely because of her unique style.

<Bella>

K (Interviewer): How do you think about the reason that people are wearing similar?
B (Bella): I don’t know. But I know that we don’t want to stick out in fashion. Mostly like that. If you go to party, you are afraid to wear too much.
K: Is it?
B: Yes, it’s like that. Sometimes you see Swedish girls have jeans at party. Maybe they wouldn’t wear jeans in like, Italy. You wouldn’t wear jeans at party. But in Sweden, you can wear casual at party. People don’t wear that much, because they are afraid to wear too much.
K: I see.
B: So that’s why people wear kind of the same. They don’t have courage to wear something different.
K: So people don’t want to be different.
B: No. […] But mainly people think like that they don’t want to be like the girl who is so much different from everyone.

Bella’s comment “we don’t want to stick out in fashion” clearly indicates that she feels some kind of pressure to fit into a crowd. She use the expression “they do not have courage” for the people who wear “the same” clothes. She thinks that people in Sweden are afraid to wear too much and be too different from other people’s style.

The following comments from Veronica are relevant to Bella’s comments in terms of the

\textsuperscript{231} Muggleton, \textit{Inside Subculture}, 66.
pressure she feels.

<Veronica>

V (Veronica): In Swedish school, my sister went, they are more prejudiced. If you don’t fit in, you might get bullied.

K (Interviewer): What kind of thing you have to fit in?

V: Like, expensive brands, or clothes or, well, I have heard a lot of people told me that they bought the jacket or whatever just to be able to fit in. I have never done that. In that way I have been really lucky. I could be able to express myself with my clothing without being hurt.

K: I see, brands.

V: Yes, brands or everything. I know that there is a style calls “fjortis”. Everyone hates that kind of style actually but still widely spread. It’s mostly smaller girls actually like, 14 or 15, they have often real bleached long hair and really brown face and bright lip stick, light pink. You can see that here [neck] might be white but here [cheek] is totally brown from the foundations and really thick eye liner and everything. They also go around with big winter jacket and really short skirt. It’s not always like that but mostly they show a lot of cleavage and often being really bitchy. That is called “fjortis”.

K: I see.

V: In a lot of Swedish school, they are the popular one. […] A lot of people who I met at the conventions who has the alternative styles, said “Yeah, I had this fjortis period in my life.” Because they just wanted to fit in and don’t want to be bullied. It’s sad actually, but people have to fit in that much.

[…]

K: You said you have friends who are interested in Japan, Oshare-kei or Manga?

V: Yes. I have a lot. Actually when I started out Anime and Manga, I was really lonely because in my school, there were nobody interested in it. So I didn’t know anyone at least. Now there are some who are reading Manga and there is one girl who wants to go to UppCon with me. In the beginning, I was lonely since I didn’t know any conventions. It was a bit tough because some people thought I was a geek, I guess I am a geek. But I never felt ashamed about it actually. When you were younger, like 15 or 16 years old, girls can be a really bitchy. I was pretty lucky actually, that I got away with it. A lot of people got bullied in school. When I started to go to conventions, I found a lot of friends. It was a whole new world open up for me. So now, I cannot go to convention without getting to know new people.

Similar to Bella, Veronica mentioned about her friends who tried to fit into dominant styles such as “fjortis”, because they do not want to get bullied. Also, Veronica herself felt lonely when she did not know about conventions and had not met other alternative style people there. Both of them imply that there is a dominant style group from which they feel some kind of pressure.

These comments clearly indicate that there is hegemonic power of the dominant style which
appears both legitimate and natural.\textsuperscript{232} According to Hebdige, hegemony emerges because of some groups’ power to make the rules, organize meaning, produce and impose their definitions of the world.\textsuperscript{233} In this sense, there may be some groups with a certain style that dominate power over other groups with a different style in Swedish context.

However the fact that no respondents could clearly describe about the dominant style, i.e. regular style or normal style, the respondents themselves cannot have a clear image of a specific dominant style group. Even though Veronica mentioned “fjortis” as one of the examples of a dominant style, she indicates that there are several other dominants styles as well. Veronica also said the regular style as a style which you can find in magazines. Consequently, it can be said that there are several dominant style groups which have hegemonic power instead of only one dominant group. It can be assumed that these dominant styles are originated in the Western society and getting aid from market powers, such as magazines. Reflecting Veronica’s comments that she was lonely when she did not know friends who had the same style and that she like to make friends in conventions, it can be assumed that as a reaction against such dominant groups’ hegemonic pressures, the fans of Japanese popular culture style gather at conventions and create their community. Different with the youth subcultures discussed by Hebdige, which aim the breakdown of consensus of hegemony by challenging hegemony with their resisting styles,\textsuperscript{234} fans of Japanese popular culture style do not obviously challenge the dominant group by their styles. Instead, they try to coexist with dominant style groups by creating their own community.

\textbf{6.2.3 Resistance to Pressures}

In addition to dominant style group pressure, several comments from the respondents imply their use of Japanese popular culture style as a mean of escaping from other pressures than dominant group pressure. The following present two pressures the respondents take refuge from by wearing Japanese popular culture style. As several subculture styles discussed in the existing literature, such as punk or mods, which were the resistance against the order that guarantees their subordination to class hierarchy\textsuperscript{235}, Japanese popular culture style also helps fans to resist against some pressures in the society.

The following comments from Lars illustrate that there is a competition of styles in Swedish

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Hebdige, \textit{Subculture}, 15-16.
\item Hebdige, \textit{Subculture}, 14-15.
\item Hebdige, \textit{Subculture}, 17-18.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
cultural context. He uses Japanese popular culture style as a mean of avoiding competition with other people about their styles.

<Lars>

L (Lars): I probably like more dress up more than outfit.
K (Interviewer): What is the difference between “dress up” and “outfit”?
L: Outfit is more like saying “this is my style” but dress up is more like “I just wear it because it is completely different” and escaping from reality. I think styles are more expressing your personality but cosplay or dress up is more like… doesn’t have to be connected to you.
K: When people dress up?
L: Usually people dress up for party or special occasions. But I was trying to do it anytime. I didn’t come to school with completely different outfits but like the ears [cosplay he made] or some tiny jewelries or such kind of things.
[…]
L: Since I couldn’t dress so well like everyone else normally do, I have to do something else. That was the main, you know, why I did that.
K: Why did you think you cannot wear like everyone else?
L: First, I didn’t really give thought for clothes so much I almost never bought clothes. Some people use all their clothes to get some kind of social message or express certain opinions, but I always thought that I couldn’t do that. I don’t know why. That’s probably why I did cosplay. I was just convinced that I couldn’t so I just wear cosplay and fooling around or doing child stuff because then I couldn’t fail because I already didn’t try to.
K: So are you trying to express something by cosplay?
L: I refuse to wear normal. I didn’t really try to stand out but. I couldn’t just express my personality so I found the way which no one else did. Because I was the only one who did it when I had it so, there were no competitions. So I didn’t need to feel worried about. But people really didn’t care about me. I might gain some respects though.

Lars’s purpose of wearing cosplay appears to be more focused on escaping from reality than enjoying fantasy. He is afraid to wear the same as other people because he does not want to be compared with other people. By wearing cosplay, which is a completely different style from other people, Lars evacuates himself from the competitive “reality” in people’s fashion styles. Not showing his own personality, he shows another identity that belongs to cosplay. Instead of enjoying an experiment of their identity by switching styles\(^\text{236}\), Lars’s motivation appeared as hiding his own

\(^{236}\) Kjeldgaard, “The meaning of style?” 78.
personality and escaping from a fashion competition.

Lars’s comments also show his preference to be unique. However, his motivation to be different from other people is originated very differently from wanting to stand out. Lars appears to want to escape from competitive attention with “everyone else”. For him, wearing Japanese popular culture style is not to get attention but to get out of competitive attention in terms of fashion styles.

In the following, Ronja also comments about escaping from reality by using her style instead of getting attention by using a unique style. Her comments clearly show her use of styles as a shelter against social pressure.

<Ronja>
K (Interviewer): When you are grown up, what kind of style you supposed to wear?
R (Ronja): Like more normal clothes like more serious looking.
K: Is it different in Japan?
R: Well, most people don’t do that so obviously but I think it’s fun that you can go out maybe in the weekend and have that kind of [Lolita] styles.
K: Do you think it’s not common in Sweden?
R: Not really.
 […]
K: You said you like to be childish.
R: Yes, I guess so. Like dressing up just for fun.
K: So you don’t want to grown up.
R: No.
K: Do you know why?
R: I think I am afraid of all the responsibilities that come when you grown up. You have to find a job and so on. I think that’s kind of scary. So if possible, I would like to keep on being child.
K: I see. Where did you get the pressure of responsibility?
R: From society. You are supposed to be able to work and support yourself.

Ronja liked to wear Lolita style dresses because she can feel like a princess by wearing childish clothes. She had an image that people in Tokyo are enjoying cute and childish styles for limited periods, e.g. weekends. This dress-up to become somebody else for a limited time, when you wear Japanese popular culture styles, are in Napier’s word liminal masquerade.237 As she argues, the Japanese popular culture styles transform fans to become others for a while and change their

237 Napier, From Impressionism to Anime, 153.
identity. For Ronja, the Japanese popular culture style is cute and childish. The style can evacuate her from “serious looking” normal clothes which are associated with pressure to be able to work and support yourself in society. In other words, she eases the pressure to be a grown up member of the society by using Japanese popular culture styles, which provide her a temporary shelter. This pressure is, in Giddens’s words, fateful circumstance. As Giddens argues, because modern individuals are supposed to do life planning and make fateful decision without traditional or habit base, the modern situations require Ronja to take refuge by wearing Japanese popular culture style clothes.

6.3 Cultural Translation and Cultural Level

The following will discuss the transition of the Japanese popular culture styles from Japanese cultural context to Swedish cultural context. Japanese popular culture styles that are originated in Japan flow beyond the national borders and were brought to Swedish cultural context. Such Japanese popular culture styles found in Swedish cultural context were not the same with the original styles in Japanese context. They were translated reflecting the Swedish people’s cultural level.

6.3.1 Cute, Childish and Princess

Similar to several media discussing cuteness as one of the most significant aspects of Japanese popular culture, four of five respondents also used words, such as cute, childish, princess, young and feminine to describe Japanese popular culture styles. These concepts are, McVeigh discusses, revolved around a cuteness axis. According to McVeigh, the consumption of cuteness is a form of “resistance” in Japan. He explained cuteness as a form of escape from the real world, from the male-dominant Japanese society or from the high-pressure social world of Japan. In McVeigh’s words, cuteness is a type of “fantasy” and a way of forgetting about the unpleasant things in everyday life in Japanese society. Napier also assumes the attraction of cuteness in foreign context as a fantasy, which is similar to the Japanese use of cuteness for escaping from the real

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238 Napier, From Impressionism to Anime, 161.
239 Giddens, Modernity and Self-Identity, 112-113.
240 Giddens, Modernity and Self-Identity, 85-87.
243 McVeigh, Wearing Ideology, 137.
world. In the following comments Ronja clearly describe her image of cuteness as childish and a princess.

<Ronja>

K (Interviewer): Can you come up with the reason why do you like the cuteness?
R (Ronja): I don’t know. I think because I’m childish.
K: Childish?
R: Yes. It’s kind of like when you are young and dress up like princess. So I guess I want to be a princess.
K: So, if you are young, you can dress like that?
R: That’s kind of why I became interested in the Japanese styles, because you are allowed to dress up like that even when you are grown up. Like, Lolita style. That was fascinating that you can dress like that even you are grown up.

For Ronja, cute things are strongly associated with children. She feels that cute style, e.g. Lolita style which feature ribbons and fluffy skirts, is for children. This association between cute Lolita styles and children is found in Bella’s comments as well. Moreover, for Ronja, such childish styles are associated with princesses, which is an ideal fantasy world for her. As presented in the previous chapter, she also comments that she likes to escape from social pressure to be grown up by wearing cute and childish clothes.

Consequently, the Japanese use of cuteness as a way of forgetting about the unpleasant things in everyday life in Japanese society, discussed by McVeigh, can be found in Ronja’s comments. That is to say, as Napier argues, attraction of cuteness in foreign context is also its fantasy. However, the association between cute and children is found to be more strong in Ronja and Bella’s comments than in McVeigh’s theory about Japan. In Japan, according to McVeigh, cuteness is permeating numerous spheres of Japanese daily life and is a “standard” aesthetic of everyday life. On the other hand, cute styles brought from Japan are translated as childish and adapted to use as a mean of creating refuge from growing up by Ronja and Bella. This cultural translation is based on the respondents’ cultural levels. The stronger connection between cute and childish found in Swedish respondents than in theories about Japanese society might be caused by a stronger pressure to be grown up in Swedish cultural context, than in Japanese cultural context. As discussed in a previous chapter, the Swedish respondents feel pressures to be grown up and be a

244 Napier, From Impressionism to Anime, 129-130.
245 McVeigh, Wearing Ideology, 137.
246 Napier, From Impressionism to Anime, 129-130.
247 McVeigh, Wearing Ideology, 135.
proper member of society. This pressure might cause the stronger connection between cute and childish in Swedish society, compared to in Japanese society. On the one hand, as McVeigh argues, pressures in Japanese society require cuteness which sweetens social existence and makes it more spontaneous, lighthearted and intimate. On the other hand, in Swedish society, the Swedish respondents feel pressure to be grown up and be a proper member of society, which might have made a strong association between cute and childish.

### 6.3.2 Feminine Males

In addition to the cute styles described by Ronja and Bella in terms of childish, two male respondents commented about cute, childish and pretty in terms of femininity. Both of them felt that Japanese men are feminine. The following comments from Lars and Martin shows their view about feminine males in Japanese cultural context and Swedish cultural context.

**<Lars>**

L (Lars): I think it’s not fair because fashion is for women, and only girls can wear pretty. Really nice clothes are not for men. There are not so many to choose from. So I was a bit frustrated.

K (Interviewer): I see.

L: So then, there are girls’ fashions for men in Japan. And that was pretty. […] In Sweden, people react to pretty [men] as silly or gay.

[…]

K: Do you think obviously feminine things are accepted [for men] in Japan?

L: Like hair clips or Hello Kitty.

K: Can you explain about the feminine a bit more?

L: Childish and pretty. In Sweden, it’s not so common for men to be childish and pretty.

K: I see.

L: For me, children’s things are pretty. For example Hello Kitty is accepted but people would think geek or thinks that you are minority. They are accepted but automatically labeled as geek or alternative.

[…]

K: People thought you are silly [because you like childish stuff]?

L: Yes, I mean […] childish as in actually being like a child are considered to be negative. It might be different in Japan.

K: Yes.

L: I think there are a lot of pretty childish boys in Japan but it’s considered to be strange [in Sweden]. For me

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and my girlfriend, we also thought it is weird but really in good way. […] 
K: How do you think about childish in Japan?
L: It’s for more broad. For example Johnny’s [pop idol group office] boys, they are childish but they are accepted. Also collecting other cute thing is common in Japan. That kind of childish seemed a lot more common in Japan.

<K (Interviewer):> Why did you choose this style [Gyaruo] instead of other styles?
M (Martin): Because by far, I think it’s coolest. […] For being a guy, girls are different, why would you choose to wake up in the morning and look like you are just sleeping when like, your girl friend makeup every day? I mean, why don’t you have same obligation? Why don’t you wanna be prettier? Because guys thinks that girls are prettier with makeup, so why shouldn’t I also be able to do that? It sounds like gay. But, you know, I’m not putting on makeup to look gay. I’m just putting on to look better.
K: I see.
M: It’s like your clothes that you want to put on something that you look pretty. Right?
[…]
K: Do you mean there is a difference of image for guys between Japan and Sweden?
M: Yes, of course. The societies are built different. So people’s opinions are based on different, whatever they are called.
K: I see. Do you like Japanese guys’ image better than Swedish one?
M: Yes.

Lars comments that fashion is for women, while men do not have many styles to choose from in Swedish context. He indicates that the use of fashion items in Japanese popular culture styles such as hair clips or Hello Kitty products are for females and not accepted for males in Swedish context. Also, Martin comments that make-up and pretty clothes are common for women but not for men in Swedish context. Furthermore, both of them believe that such gender restriction of cute or pretty styles that is only for female is not fair. This Martin and Lars’s idea that the fashion is only for women is similar to the idea that is condemned in women’s liberation movement beginning 1970s which is against the stereotyped ideals of beauty forced on women. In contrast to the movement in which the feminine fashion is criticized by feminists249, two male respondents, Lars and Martin, implied that such feminine fashion styles are attractive that they wish to wear on themselves.

Males in Japanese popular culture, such as musicians or models in magazines appeared for Lars and Martin as feminine. McVeigh also argues that cuteness is not restricted to women in

Japanese context\textsuperscript{250}. Such cuteness found in males in Japanese popular culture styles appears for Lars and Martin as a type of freedom and no restriction of styles. For them, males in Japanese popular culture styles appear as enjoying cute styles without gender restrictions.

However, in Japanese cultural context, there are strict gender roles which are similar to Western countries; there is a traditional dichotomy between the masculine and feminine dispositions in Japan. As Tsurumi argues, in Japanese context, desirable “female” traditional characteristics are “unworldly”, stay-at-home wives and mothers. By contrast, desirable “male” traditional characteristics in Japanese context are worldly, physically brave and work hard outside their home.\textsuperscript{251} Therefore, Japanese feminine males in popular cultures can be assumed as one form of resistances toward the traditional dichotomy between the masculine and feminine dispositions in Japan. For example, one of the Japanese visual-kei brand’s concepts, “It is either male or female but it is also neither male nor female. […] The pursuit of a middle ground”\textsuperscript{252}, shows their willingness of avoiding specific gender stigmas. Also manga characters, discussed by Tsurumi, are not limited to narrow models of masculinity and femininity, which challenge the traditional gender stereotypes.\textsuperscript{253} McVeigh argues that wearing make-up is also a form of subversion because usually it is forbidden to use in Japanese schools.\textsuperscript{254} It might be true that there are much more of these resistances forms toward gender restriction in Japanese context than Swedish context and such resistance forms are ubiquitous in Japanese context. However, they are not originally mainstream gender figures that are accepted in the Japanese cultural context.

The feminine males, who were originally a resistance toward gender restriction in Japanese context, were recognized as socially accepted figures in Japan for Martin and Lars. By consuming Japanese popular culture forms, they understand the gender equality in terms of male cuteness in Japanese society based on their cultural level. Feminine male styles in the Japanese popular culture are adopted as socially accepted freedom from gender restriction in cultural translation by Swedish respondents.

\textbf{6.3.3 Detail and Thought Through}

He discusses that things and manners of Japan, e.g. the bouquet, the objects, the trees, the faces, the gardens, and the texts, seem diminutive to him. According to him, this is not by reason of their size, but because every object, every gesture, even the most free, the most mobile seems framed. The miniature, according to Barthes, does not drive from the dimension, but from a kind of precision in which the things are observed delimiting themselves, stopping, finishing.  

Two respondents’ uses of the word “detail” to describe their styles’ important feature appear similar to Barthes’s argument of diminutive Japanese cultural forms. The following comments from Martin and Bella shows their ideas of “detail” in Japanese popular culture styles.

<Martin>
K (Interviewer): What is the difference between you and other people?
M (Martin): One of the things I didn’t mention is the difference of wearing accessories.
K: Accessories?
M: I mean earrings and piercings. That is one of the shiny things. In Swedish it’s probably called tingeling, in Japanese it’s Kira-kira. That’s one of the standing out thing. Also, it’s about details. They are small, like nails, if you look from far away, you cannot see them. But if you look close, there are those small things. They show that you are taking care of your selves. That’s an important point.
K: I see.
M: Like also for guys, shaving eye brow and whatever.
K: I see.
M: Like putting things on your hair or things like that. I mean not so many people care about it so much.
[...]
K: What kind of thing you like [in Japan]?
M: It’s really common though, when you go to Japan, they are doing things really Shikkari [steadily]. Like their work, if you go to a store in Sweden, there is no one say that “you are really welcome, Welcome!”. things like that. And you know, That’s one of the things that people are happy about. Just those things that are called culture stuff but each things, in the most case, are appreciated by people. Like, small Japanese things.

<Bella>
K (Interviewer): How you think about the attraction of your style comparing with other styles, like rock styles or minimalistic styles or whatever other styles?
B (Bella): I just think it looks really nice because Gyaru styles are really about the details. A lot of details and a lot of thought through. Sometimes I think Swedish minimalistic styles are so boring. So Gyaru are really nice. It’s not like I don’t like regular styles, but I like that I can take the regular high fashion and turn it into

Gyaru. I can just mix them.

K: I see.

B: Because Gyaru is not only about clothing, but also makeup, hair and nails, so that’s why I really like it. I really like doing my makeup or my hairs. I really feel I am beautiful.

Martin comments that the use of tiny accessories and taking care of himself are important details of his style. By “detail”, he literary means using fine and delicate small fashion items and close care about his body. In addition to it, he uses “Shikkari” (steadily) to describe general Japanese manners. Bella also uses “detail” to describe Gyaru styles. By “detail”, she means extra care of makeup, nails and hair. Also, Bella uses “thought through” continuously to describe Gyaru style. She indicates, by using the wording “thought through”, that Gyaru style people are paying attention to their style extra much and speculating or pondering their style carefully. This “thought through” is not necessarily about size but more about extra care and effort for their styles.

Martin and Bella’s use of “detail”, “Shikkari (steadily)” and “thought through” is partly similar to Barthes’s arguments of “diminutive”. Steadily restricted Japanese manners, mentioned by Martin, clearly signify “framed” actions. Also taking care of one’s body by shaving eye brows, putting on make-up or styling the hair are “frames” in Barthes word. Taking care of one’s body by shaving eye brows, putting on make-up or styling hair are acts to neaten and tidy up one self into frame. It appears that to fit to the way it should be, i.e. to frame oneself into the ideal shape, is one of the important features of Japanese popular culture styles.

It is indicated that there are strict social “frames” in Japanese society. As McVeigh argues, in Japanese society, bureaucracizing forces of statism and corporate culture are difficult to ignore and a strictly regulated, controlled, and highly competitive educational system decides one’s fate. Japanese culture or Asian ditto is often discussed as interdependence, i.e. motivated to adjust oneself into a social relationship, in contrast to Western culture which promote independence and autonomy. This “frame”, into which people adjust and fit themselves in Japanese cultural context, would have appeared “diminutive” in Barthes eyes and “detailed”, “steadily” or “thought through” for the respondents of this study, based on their Western cultural value. The respondents appreciate such “detail”, “steadily” or “thought through” as a deliberately neatened style.

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256 Barthes, Empire of Signs, 43.
7 Conclusion

From the macro point of view in globalization, this study made one specific kind of cultural flow clear. A global cultural flow that is not cultural imperialism or Americanization surely exists in Sweden. The Japanese popular culture style flows from Japan in the Asian sphere to Sweden in the Western sphere through information technology, market forces, and people’s physical travelling. As Hannerz\textsuperscript{259}, Polhems\textsuperscript{260} and Inda and Rosaldo\textsuperscript{261} argue, culture is not strictly in localized terms anymore, because of globalization it is pulled apart from place and flows worldwide. The Japanese popular culture, pulled apart from original place, is adopted by foreign local fans and appropriated to their local identity situation. These fans create their own community, which is originated from the local people’s life instead of the original Japanese context.

From the micro point of view in local people’s life experiences, this study found that one of the transnational cultural flows, Japanese popular culture style, which originated in the Far East Asia, have a deep relation with foreign local fans’ life experiences. As is the same with three centuries ago when the nineteenth-century Japonisme was caused by a longing for a complex fantasy, in which Westerners took pleasure of an unknown dreamlike Japanese culture, the flow of Japanese popular culture in the twenty-first century globalization appeared as a desire toward fantasy.

The fundamental appeal of Japanese popular culture styles for Swedish fans appears to be caused by a consumer desire, which was born between consumption fantasies and social situational contexts discussed by Belk et al.\textsuperscript{262} As Belk et al. discusses, although immediate fans’ desires seems to focus on Japanese popular culture goods and fashion items that are just out of reach, the deeper longing seems to be for a transformation of the self.\textsuperscript{263} By living in completely different styles, e.g. Japanese popular culture style, instead of Swedish conventional style, fans desire to be a transformed other self. In other words, what make a consumer’s desire attach to a particular object is not so much the object’s particular characteristics as the consumer’s own hopes for an altered state of being, involving an altered set of social relationships, such as their changed identity.\textsuperscript{264}

The fans’ desire found in this study underlines the deeply social and cultural character of consumer desire. This study suggests the importance of specific cultural contexts for desired objects.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item Hannerz, “Flows, Boundaries and Hybrids,” 2.
\item Polhems, “What to wear in the global village,” 265.
\item Belk et al., “The Fire of Desire,” 347.
\item Belk et al., “The Fire of Desire,” 348.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
The Swedish cultural context plays a key role to the desire toward Japanese popular culture products. The relation between Swedish cultural context and the desire toward Japanese popular culture styles became clear in the analysis of Swedish fan’s identity situation. Fans seek Japanese popular culture styles as a fantasy that they can take refuge in and escape from the pressures of dominant style groups or the society in Swedish cultural context. That is to say, this study found that Swedish fans desire to take refuge in and escape from pressures, altered set of social relationships, which caused in Swedish cultural context.

Not all of the random Japanese products are desired and brought to Sweden by chance. To fit to Swedish fans’ local identity situations in the Swedish cultural context, the fans use their own cultural levels to recognize and understand Japanese popular culture styles. Japanese popular culture products are meaningfully selected and brought into Swedish cultural context reflecting the Swedish fans’ cultural level. For example, by the respondents in this study, Japanese popular culture styles are associated with childish, femininity and details. The childish style appeals to the Swedish respondents, who wish not to grow up and be an adult member of society. The feminine style appeals to the Swedish male respondents who wish to enjoy fashion freely without gender restrictions. The framed style that is originated in social pressure to fit into the proper forms attracts the Swedish respondents as neat and deliberate, or in the respondents’ words, detailed. The elements of Japanese popular culture are translated to be able to adopt into local fans’ identity situations by reflecting Swedish fans’ cultural levels. The fans adopt Japanese popular culture styles as a means of providing an altered state of being in the Swedish cultural context and strongly desire Japanese popular culture goods and fashion items. This fans’ desire create the Japanese popular culture flows in Swedish cultural context.

Thus, the flows of cultures are based on local people’s cultural level in Barthes’ word.265 According to their cultural level, the foreign forms are interpreted and appropriated into their life. In Calefato’s words, the imported foreign forms are translated by local consumers.266 That is to say, the local consumers are not passively consuming imported cultural forms as rare or superior products. They desire and consume the foreign forms in their local cultural context, such as their identity construction, reflecting their cultural level. The local people’s life experiences remain in a local cultural context even in the globalization. In other words, the global cultural flow is not leading to cultural homogenization. Japanese popular culture products are translated in reflection with Swedish

266 Calefato, “Fashion as cultural translation,” 346.
cultural level by Swedish fans and desired to alter the fans’ state of being in the Swedish local context.

7.1 Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Further Research

As is true for most of cultural studies, this study has limitations that can be improved by future researchers. The following three limitations could be improved in future researches to achieve an enhanced understanding of the Japanese popular culture styles in globalization.

First, the ages of the respondents are limited in this study: three of five respondents are 23 years old. Because all the respondents are contacted through their friend network depending on their styles, their ages are similar. Fortunately, those respondents could mention about their life experiences when they were teenagers, so we could understand the transition of their styles and their experiences. However, a more diverse range of respondents from different ages might help getting a more comprehensive understanding of the style situation in Sweden.

Second, the researcher’s nationality might have affected this study. Since the researcher is Japanese, most of the respondents’ comments show a positive and affirmative view of Japan. Also, they might be more modest than their real feeling when talking about Japanese society and culture, since the respondents expect that the researcher knows more about Japan than they do. On the other hand, since the respondents expect the researcher to have a lot of knowledge about Japan, they seemed to feel sympathy and often became open-minded.

Third, the style defined in this study, Japanese popular culture style, is a vague concept. To examine the global cultural flow, several styles originating from Japan, from Cosplay to Gyaru, are aimed to be examined. However, the styles’ features, purposes, intended occasions or sources are very different. That is to say, each of these styles cannot be count as one Japanese popular culture style. A more close investigation focusing on each different style would help profound understanding of the phenomena.
8 Bibliography


**Electronic sources**


- E-mail interview with organizer of Confusion, February 1, 2011.
- E-mail interview with the UppCon organizer, February 1, 2011.
http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20080828f1.html.
Appendix A: Interview Questions

- Biographical Questions
1) How old are you?
2) What job do you do now? (If any, what different job have you done before?)
3) What job do your parents do?
4) What education your parents had?

- Question about Photographs
5) When/Where did you take these pictures? (If any, who are you together with in these pictures?)
6) Tell me about your styles in these pictures? / How do you describe your styles in these pictures?
7) What does your style in these pictures mean? / Why did you wear these styles?
8) Tell me where did you get the idea of your style in these pictures? / What were you inspired by?
9) How did you feel about your style when you took this picture?

- Questions about their Style
10) How do you describe the way you dress?
11) What are the key words for your styles?
12) How long have you been dressing like this?
13) How do you feel your relation to Japan?
14) When did you feel comfortable/ uncomfortable with your style?
15) What made you choose the way you dress?
16) What does your way to dress means to you?
17) What were the main influences for you? Where did you get your ideas about the style from?
18) Where/ How do you get your items of clothing from?
19) Is it important to you to have your own, unique way of dressing? Why?
20) Do people who dress in your style tend to have anything in common apart from the style? What is it? (A particular way of life, way of behaving, music?) Is this true for you personally?
21) Do you ever feel ties or bonds with other people who you see dressed in a similar style, even if you don’t know them personally? What kind of ties or bounds?
22) How is your style different comparing with other people?
Appendix B: Photographs from Convention in Göteborg