

# KAWAII AS REPRESENTED BY WEARERS IN FRANCE USING THE EXAMPLE OF LOLITA FASHION

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**Pagrindinės sąvokos:** *Kawaii*, Lolitos stiliaus dėvėtojai Prancūzijoje, identitetas, egzotizmas, orientalizmas, nesubrendimas, akultūracija, transnacionalinis, simbolinė interakcija.

## Introduction

In my paper, I will discuss how *kawaii* is represented by French wearers and how their representation of Japanese *kawaii* fashion is constructed.

France is considered one of the countries that accept the highest volume of Japanese popular culture, which it has done since the first Japonism boom. The term '*kawaii*' has been disseminated as a representative keyword associated with 'Cool Japan'<sup>1</sup>, as evidenced by the Director General, Public Diplomacy Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, appointing three people from the fashion field and pop culture, commissioning them as Trend Communicators of Japanese Pop Culture, or '*kawaii* Ambassadors'<sup>2</sup>, to make more active use of Japan's pop culture, which has been enjoying very high popularity among young people around the world.

My question in this paper is, is *kawaii* an odourless form of culture that

<sup>1</sup> Cool Japan is a Japanese cultural phenomena that includes anime, fashion, and foods that are popular abroad (evening edition of *Japanese Economics* newspaper, January 8th, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/event/2009/2/1188515\\_1152.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/event/2009/2/1188515_1152.html) (retrieved May 29th 2011).

makes context irrelevant, or is it an ethnic/exotic culture taken root in a stereotype of Japan? Several scholars argue that when *kawaii*, one of key words of Japanese popular cultural products, aimed to be exported to the global market, it would have the property of odourlessness and therefore distance itself from stereotypical images constructed by foreign countries (Yomota 2006, Iwabuchi 2006, Botz-Bornsteins 2011). What's more, Japanese sociologist Shinji Miyadai discusses *kawaii* culture as one that makes context irrelevant (Miyadai 2010: 208). Miyadai continued to show that when this function of *kawaii* is no longer available in Japanese society, the function has begun to be diffused (ibid: 89).

At the same time, *kawaii* could be considered a persistent stereotypical image of Japan, an ethnic notion proper to the country. In the 19th century novel *Madam Chrysanthemum*, the narrator states, "I really abuse the adjective 'petit' (little in English), I know it well, but how could I do what? – In describing the things of this country, I tended to use it 10 times in a line. Little, vapid, cute (in a negative sense): the moral and physiques of Japan are in these three words..." (Loti 1990: 182). The author used the adjective "cute" in English, as in, "They are cute." As the French writer Michel Butor said, "Loti felt adult in a childish country..." (Butor 1995: 41). S. Kinsella says that *kawaii* is a way of escaping from the restrictions governing Japanese youth (Kinsella 1995: 251). Even now, as Brian Moeran indicates regarding the images of Japan presented in British advertisements, Japanese people are often represented as children, women, or incomprehensible (Moeran 2006: 77-112). Thus, *kawaii*/immaturity/childish, which is particular to Japan and not fit for Europe, has been historically found as an image of Japan, becoming deeply rooted since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

What is more, Keith Vincent traces this immaturity (Vincent 2010: 15-46) through the comments of the Japanese artist Takashi Murakami<sup>3</sup> in *Littleboy* (Murakami 2005), saying for example Japanese immaturity is based on the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the occupation of the USA (quoted by Keith ibid: 32).

Thus, could *kawaii* disseminated in particular in the French context be considered odourless culture or is it a reproduction of exoticism, the inheritance of the Japonism of the 19th century, or of Japanese defeat in

<sup>3</sup> Murakami is one of those diffusing the term *kawaii* in particular in France through his exhibition *Kawaii vacances été* held at the Cartier Foundation Museum.

World War II? How can we explain *kawaii* culture and its influences on the formation of identities/representations?

So could *kawaii* in France be considered odourless culture that makes the context irrelevant, or as ethnic culture taken root in a stereotype of Japan and reinforcing this stereotype?

*Kawaii* Fashion in France is variously defined. First of all, it includes *Harajuku Street Fashion* including *Sweet Lolita* and *Siro* (white) *Lolita*<sup>4</sup>, *Decora* or *Fairy-kei*<sup>5</sup> 3, and *Cosplay*<sup>6</sup>. Why do people wear *kawaii* fashion? How do they represent *kawaii* fashion? The ‘identity’ of our period is perceived as being the crossing point of how I and others look, identities/representations surrounding *kawaii* fashion in France might be constructed

<sup>4</sup> Lolita and Gothic Lolita:

Gothic Lolita goes by the popular name *gosurori* and refers to the Lolita Fashion fashion style (according to N. Onohara analysing the tendency of Gothic Lolita). Lolita is not simply about wearing the clothes of a child, but indicates a fashion like that of a French doll, with features such as pretty frills as in the dresses of Europe in the Middle of Ages. This fashion is, however, probably more akin to Lewis Carroll’s Alice than to Nabokov’s Lolita (Onohara 2008: 221-222). According to Ait-Ouara Nesryne (2009), Gothic Lolita style, presented first in the Japanese fashion magazines *Zipper* and *Junie* in the second half of the 1990s, is formed by the interaction of 4 following factors/people:

1. The Harajuku doll (the wearers of large sized children clothes).
2. Victorian fashion proposed by English fashion designer Vivian Westwood.
3. Supporters imitating the style of Japanese *visual-kei* artist and American gothic musicians.
4. The image of the maid as one part of *Otaku* Culture. This underground fashion became popular thanks to some Gothic Lolita fashion brand such as Baby The Stars Shine Bright. H. Naoto has been presented in some Japanese fashion magazines such as *Kera!* or *Kera! The Gothic Lolita Bible*. Afterwards in France this tendency became popular among the young generation through Japanese anime fan *otaku* and *Visual kei* rock music fans, the diffusion of this style in the Internet, and the transfer from underground to mainstream culture. The Sub-categories of gothic Lolita, such as Elegant Gothic Aristocrat, Industrial Lolita, Country Lolita, Sweet Lolita were born through the boom in this style (De Margerie 137-138) according to the *Dictionnaire du look*. Onohara added to these the sub-genre Wa Lolita (Japanese-style Lolita) (Onohara: 2007).
5. According to the Rainbowteam forum whose participants are Harajuku street fashion wearers. The FRUiTS, inspired by the Japanese fashion journal FRUiTS published since 1997 by Shozo Aoki, presenting Harajuku street Fashion, is the basis for Decoras. The FRUiTS is more ‘softs’ and is a style that does not have precise regulations. The Decoras is more charged, more related to accessories and so on; the style of the fairy kei is light, soft, pop and cute, with pastel colours ([http://rainbow-team.forum-actif.net /t1173-faq-de-la-rainbow-team](http://rainbow-team.forum-actif.net/t1173-faq-de-la-rainbow-team), retrieved May 22nd 2012).
6. “Cosplay (*kosupre*), short for ‘costume play’, is type of performance art in which participants wear costumes and accessories to represent a specific character or idea.(...) Favorite source include manga and anime, comic books, video games and films” (Wikipedia, [en-wikipedia/wiki/Cosplay](http://en.wikipedia/wiki/Cosplay) retrieved December 14, 2012).

at the place where its French wearers, and their ‘spectators’ such as their parents, friends, the public in the street, media, etc., intersect.

In this paper, I will focus on opinions given by wearers in France of Lolita Fashion, one of the *kawaii* fashions, who participate in the Lolita Convention forum. I will also analyse how the *kawaii* fashion wearers themselves (re)present their own *kawaii* fashion and what *kawaii* means for them.

### **Fashion, Identity, Others**

Identity can be defined using three points, as follows. First, it can be defined as a constructed representation. B. Olivier explains: The identities are representations, images, and not realities. Identity is constructed. It is the object of permanent interpretation and reinterpretation. A system of representation of the self and the other produces individual identity, while representation of ourselves and others produces collective identity (Olivier 2009: 8). The second point is that the other can be necessary to construct the identity of the self: identity is a “product of the relation to others” (Benichou 2006: 13). As the third point, I indicate that the other is not a reality but a representation. According to J. Berting, “the observation of the other is to be governed by collective representations or stereotypes as soon as the distinction is done: a person is the other because a person has one or several features which distinguish them from us” (Berting 2009: 58). The collective representation of the other formed by stereotypes is used to construct self-identity. To examine the construction of identity in my paper, I define identity as a representation produced in relation to the representation of the other by stereotypes, where the other has some features distinguishing them from us.

Fashion could be considered a device constructing this identity. It could be said that Japanese clothing fashions adopted in France have a significant role in creating the identity of their wearers, spectators and Japan in French eyes.

## **Kawaii Represented by Wearers of the Lolita Convention through Questions to Lolita Convention Forum Members**

This forum<sup>7</sup> is formed by French Lolita Fashion devotees, who organise a Lolita Convention once a year, which is already introduced in the TV program “TOKYO KAWAII TV”<sup>8</sup> from Japan’s national broadcaster NHK (Nippon Hoso Kyokai). I asked its members questions by e-mail. There were 19 respondents, teenagers and people in their twenties. I put the 7 following questions to Lolita Fashion wearers belonging to this forum in order to examine whether they consider *kawaii* fashion as exotic Japanese fashion, far from the French norm, or rather as immature fashion or fashion even for mature woman, as it is in Japan; and to examine how wearers construct their own identity through *kawaii* fashion, and Japan’s image.

### **1. Why do wearers adopt kawaii/Lolita style**

When Japanese people wore Western (notably French) fashion, in particular after the defeat of WWII, they did so because they wanted to be westernised, to be far from “traditional Japan” (Koma 2012). However, I try to examine through this question why my respondents/wearers wear *kawaii* fashion. In order to be Japanese, even while the Japanese aim to be westernised? Or to be what?

Firstly, the most frequent answer to this question is, I feel good because it is my personality (*Je me sens bien c’est ma personnalité*), as follows:

- (a) I wear this style because it reflects my personality. I feel good when I wear Lolita Fashion, completely myself, I feel good in this style and it corresponds to my ideal life: elegant, meticulous, innocent, rare.
- (b) I feel good in these styles; I can permit myself to be feminine without being vulgar.
- (c) Because it is a distinguished and refined universe which pleases me, I love the beautiful clothes and most of Lolita dress (...) it is a dream to me. It is a universe which attracts me because it is particular and because I feel good in this style.

<sup>7</sup> The Lolita convention is organised by the Rouge Dentelle & Rose Ruban Association, which was created in May 2009. Its goal is to promote Lolita Fashion, to encourage and help artists and young creators (drawers, writers, musicians, fashion designers, etc.) ([conventionlolitaworldpress.com/qui-sommes-nous-2/qui-sommes-nous/](http://conventionlolitaworldpress.com/qui-sommes-nous-2/qui-sommes-nous/) retrieved on December 14, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> NHK, the Japanese Broadcasting Corporation, started broadcasting a program called Tokyo Kawaii TV, presenting *kawaii* as it is admired around the world.

(d) Yes I wear the Lolita style. Lolita corresponds to the things I search for: femininity, liberty, elegance, romance and purity.

(e) I wear several different Lolita styles which represents the different facets of my character.

(f) I love very much the flared effect of the cut of the dresses. They are the forms which evoke to me 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century French women. It is a fashion which for me is elegant, distinguish, original without being ostentatious. And for me they are the forms of dresses easiest to be worn because it suits my morphology, in which I feel beautiful and good. I always love the aristocratic esprit, the beautiful materials.

(g) I wear these styles firstly because they permit me to express my creativity. What most people wear is not interesting for me, I prefer wear these style and feel really comfortable, because they harmonise with my way of being and my style of life.

(h) I love the style of clothes because they are feminine, elegant, pure with a natural and historic touch. I feel good in this style; it corresponds to my way of life.

As Sontag shows, “the self can be steadied because of the fact that clothes can be identified with the self or be a part of the self” (...) to stability of the self (Sontag and Schlater 1982, cited by Kaiser 1994: 106). Wearers’ answers also show that Lolita style give its wearers the stability of a type of identity. The reasons why most Lolita Fashion wearers say that they feel good in Lolita Fashion can be summarised into 2 principal opinions:

(1) Lolita Fashion is elegant Occidental dress of the 19<sup>th</sup> century or the period of Marie Antoinette.

(a) I love feeling feminine with very beautiful dresses. I love being as elegant as a lady of the 19<sup>th</sup> century or the period of Marie Antoinette.

(b) This style permits me to wear beautiful dresses that are similar to those of a beautiful lady of the Victorian or earlier period.

(c) It is elegant and more beautiful than most classical occidental clothes.

(d) I wear Lolita in my daily life because I love the form of the clothes, and also for the femininity and the elegance which this style brings (although I hope not to be considered “*kawaii*”).

(e) I would wear the Lolita style but not the Sweet. And I do not wear any *kawaii* style.

(2) I feel like a princess .

This answer is similar to (1). Instead of the dress of a 19<sup>th</sup> century, the term Princess is used.



- (a) I wear the Sweet Lolita; I love the laces and all things that are pink in general, so this style corresponds well to me. I feel like princess when I am in Lolita style.
- (b) I wear Lolita style because I find it elegant and childish. Being a beautiful little girl is an ideal in my clothing habits.
- (c) I very much love this fashion, which gives a 'doll' or 'princess' effect with which we enter a different universe, filled with cute things.
- (d) Yes, I have worn Lolita for 5 years. I feel as elegant and beautiful in this style as a princess.

Most of the answers to the question why do you wear Lolita style, "I feel good because it is my personality", are influenced by the person's dream to be a French/European lady or princess of the 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century, although some gave a similar answer relating to a doll or pirate as the object of their dreams. However, nowhere did I receive the answer: "to be Japanese", even though Lolita Fashion was born in Japan. I could not find *Japaneseness* as a reason why wearers wear Lolita Fashion in contrast to the Japanese people who follow French fashion (Koma 2013). Thus concerning this question, Kawaii Fashion, and in particular Lolita Fashion should be considered odourless even European culture, at least from the point of view of these Lolita Fashion wearers.

## **2. Do you know from where Lolita Fashion and *kawaii* style come, and when this style was invented?**

This question was put to Lolita Fashion wearers to examine if they consider Lolita/*kawai* fashion as Japanese.

The answers to this question can be divided into three:

- (a) Gothic Lolita comes from Japan, and in particular is influenced by Mana. *Kawaii* Harajuku Fashion is Japanese original Fashion (6 answers).
- (b) The origin of most Lolita Fashion is Victorian Style, Marie Antoinette Style, Rococo style, and 19th century English and French aristocratic style. Japan found these in the 1970s through the fashion shop Milk, and in the 1990s through the *visual kei* band *Mana* and through Harajuku (11 answers).
- (c) The lolita Fashion is European Fashion (1 answer).

Most of the answers were (b). Lolita fashion born in Japan is not considered completely Japanese Fashion. And I found many answers that Kawaii fashion is only sweet Lolita Fashion and Harajuku street Fashion.

Japan has freely acculturated Western fashion and clothes since the Meiji

era, in particular after WWII, without having the dress code that Westerners follow (Koma 2013). This situation permits the Japanese young generation to invent or acculturate Western style freely without thinking about the society's eye not because it is possible that as D. Hebdige wrote, young generation wears fashion ironically breaking the dress code as a move against the society, (Hebdige 1981). Rather because young Japanese people want to present their creativity and search for a group of friends/community to which they could belong, as Kaiser mentioned that subculture Fashion could be device for young generation to belong to small subgroup (Kaiser 1994:164-165).

This 'liberty' or the flexibility of Japan, which has acculturated Western culture without limiting their code, would be diffused by Internet and give an occasion to French people to recognise a possibility to wear their ancestor's style/*kawaii* street fashion which are never worn in French Society. This liberty or flexibility could be considered Japaneseness.

**3. When you wear the Lolita or *kawaii*, do you consider this style as exotic? Do you feel close to Japanese culture thanks to this style; or on the contrary, do you feel you keep your own European culture?**

This question is asked to Lolita Fashion wearers directly in order to understand their opinion to my principal question: is *kawaii* exotic/out of the norm for France or is it culturally odourless?

The answers to this question are similar to ones to the question 3.

**(a) This style is exotic (3 answers).**

This style permits to me to be close to Japan.

Some sub-styles of Lolita such as decora, and Sweet Lolita are considered exotic.

**(b) This style is European (7 answers).**

Even if I know this style thanks to Japan, this origin of this style is Rococo, Marie Antoinette and Victorian style. With this style I feel that I am a lost child out of time.

This style is exotic for Japanese people, not for us.

**(c) Lolita style is European and Japanese (11 answers)**

The Lolita look is very European, but the look of others observing my Lolita style makes me feel that this style is very exotic and derivate from French social norms.

Spectators consider me a person belonging to the Japanese cultural sphere. It is true this is a very European fashion style but this is because it comes from Japan.



Although there were only 3 people who thought that Lolita/*kawaii* fashion is very exotic, 7 people considered it a European style, and 11 people considered it a European and Japanese style because of its origin in 19<sup>th</sup> century French and English aristocratic lady's style. And as we saw already in the answers to question 2, even the Lolita/*kawaii* wearers wear this style because they feel good in European lady's or princess styles (except decora and Sweet), as the above-mentioned answer 4(C) shows, the opinion of French spectators about the wearers is not the same. They consider the wearers to be outsiders who are not within the French social norm. This look makes the wearers and their *kawaii* style exotic and out of step with style in France, in contrast to the wearers' intention. This construction of the identity of the wearers is confirmed by the idea that, as I show in the beginning of the paper, Identity is formed at the crossing point of observations of the self and the other: identity is image represented by the other. So is it really that the wearers think that this style is not exotic? We will check the following question.

#### **4. When do you wear the *kawaii*/Lolita fashion?**

1. The weekend or holidays (9 people): when I go out with my friends, when I have no classes, summer holidays, the weekend.
2. Japan expo, conventions, meetings where I can wear more eccentric clothes (6 people).
3. Daily life outside the work place or work meetings: because it is not well thought of (5 people); I do not want to get my dress dirty (2 people).
4. When my family is not with me (1 person).
5. Every time I do no sport or I am not alone (3 people).
6. I wear it every day, but I change the style according to the situation (to be less eccentric) (4 people).

Except three people (Every time I do no sport or I am not alone), most wearers tend not to wear Lolita in their daily lives but at the weekend or during holidays, in unofficial places, or at Japan Expo. This result shows us that even if the wearers consider Lolita fashion as non-exotic Western fashion when alone, they know that French society does not accept this style as normal, and they avoid being 'exotic' in official social place, such as work, in order to belong to mainstream 'French society'. As answers to the questionnaire show, it can be considered that wearers know that Lolita/*kawaii* fashion is exotic for French Society.

### 5. Does Lolita/*kawaii* fashion enable you to attract other people?

This question is asked to examine how Lolita fashion wearers feel in public spaces. S.B. Kaiser shows that clothing behaviour could be considered a compromise of “synchronism with the society” and “personality”, i.e., as a compromise of “I” (corresponding to the self as impulse, subject) and “me” (corresponding to self as social self, object) as per Mead’s term<sup>9</sup> (Kaiser 1985: 149). But how do Lolita fashion wearers present themselves in public space? Do they want to be socialised, to attract people in the public space or to present their originality?

1. I attract other Lolita fashion wearers, other marginal genre peoples, people interested in abnormal things (3 people).
2. I am closed in the street. I never attract anyone.
3. I do not tend to attract any men with this style, but I attracted some men as result (2 people).
4. I do not attract anyone in the sexual sense, but people belonging to several levels, such as general public, old men, children are interested in my style and approaching me (5 people).
5. I attract the general public, as well as men, more with Lolita fashion than with other styles. I feel better because I feel that I am really myself in this style (4 people).
6. I wear it not to attract others but only for my own pleasures (2 people).
7. My fashion is not well thought of in the street (3 people).
8. Men do not want to be with me in Lolita Style. It would be difficult for a man to be together in the street with me in pink (1 person).

Certainly answers such as “I attract the general public, as well as men, better with Lolita fashion than with other styles”, show that these respondents wear the Lolita Fashion to be ‘the me’, the self as object interacting with onlookers/the public to be socialised. But on the other hand, most of the respondents’ answers show that wearers are the ‘I’, the self as subject, not including the gaze of the public, giving answers such as “I do not tend to attract any men with this style”, “I wear it not to attract others but for my pleasure”, “my fashion is not well thought of in the street”. The answer

<sup>9</sup> According to George Herbert Mead, symbolic interactionist, the ‘Me’ is the social self and the I is the response to the Me. The Me is the accumulated understanding of the generalised other, i.e. how one thinks one’s group perceives oneself. The I is the individual impulses. The I is self as subject, the Me is self as object. The self is considered a combination of the I and the Me (cited by Kaiser 1994: 101).

“I attract other Lolita fashion wearers, other people from marginal genres, people interested in abnormal things” shows us that wearers create a small sub-group with the wearers trying to be ‘me’ in order to socialise in their own culture group outside the norm of French society. It could be said that this result shows that Lolita fashion, one of the *kawaii* fashions, is considered by wearers to be exotic and outside the norm for French society.

### **6. What is *kawaii* style for you? Would Lolita Fashion be considered *kawaii* style?**

The wearers’ answers to this question can be broken down into 4 types.

(1) Answers concerning the colours and design of *kawaii* style.

Wearers mentioned there are many pink, pastel and clear colours in *Kawaii* style such as: many pastel and pink colours, we wear clear colours, *kawaii* is a style with colours such as the clear blue, pink or other clear and pastel colours, a cute style with pink; bonbons, sweet things; a style that means cute, coloured; coloured clothes and accessories, cute *grisgris* often representing small animals, cakes, bonbons.

In Lolita fashion in general, Sweet Lolita could be considered *kawaii* Fashion because of their certain colours, such as blue, pink, mint which we do not dare to put on especially among our ‘daily’ clothes.

(2) Answers concerning the childishness of this style are as follows:

(a) *Kawaii* style is cute and a little childish.

(b) A style denoting a certain purity, innocence and modesty; with the character of the world of childhood in the way of being out of step and recreational.

(c) *Kawaii* style is considered to include the decora, the spank, Sweet Lolita, etc. Wearers should be in general be childish and wear clear colours.

(d) It is a style for children or teenagers.

(e) It is a style that means cute, colourful, and makes one think of childhood by its softness or its exuberance, such as the decora.

(f) *Kawaii* style includes in my opinion elements that refer to childhood in the sense that its elements are cute.

(d) *Kawaii* style often evokes the world of childhood and dreams, etc. Personally, I see it as the mix of fantasy and of innocence.

*Kawaii* style is cute and elegant, which refers to a childish imaginary. Certain elements of Lolita fashion enter this criteria (Sweet Lolita, Shiro Lolita, OTT), but not all styles.

(3) A style far from French social standards:

(a) A style that denotes certain purity, innocence and modesty, the character of the world of Childhood in the meaning of being out of step and recreational.

(b) I will define it at the same time as cute and strange (extraordinary), Lolita corresponds to *kawaii* which would be sweet or gothic.

(c) Among Lolita fashion in general, Sweet Lolita could be considered *kawaii* fashion because of its colours, such as blue, pink, mint which we do not dare to put on especially among our 'daily' clothes.

As we saw, *kawaii* is represented by Lolita fashion wearers in France as childish – pastel colours for children and so on. It would be strange or exceptional to wear childish clothes in France even according to some Lolita fashion wearers. *Kawaii* used in the Japanese media does not follow this pattern: *kawaii* is also used to designate mature women whose style is not the pastel colours of children but those of the mature woman (Koma in print 2013).

## 7. What does *kawaii* signify for you?

The answers to this can be broken down into 4 parts.

1. A way of life, wearing the clothes.

2. Fashion characters:

Pastel colours (4) with ribbons (1), Sweet as gothic, the universe of childhood (3)

3. People

Manga characters, Misako Aoki, ambassador *kawaii* (5), Moon Kana (1) Kyari pyamu pyamu (2), Tsubasa Masukawa, Au café, The gazette, A person who has not lost the child in her, happy and dynamic.

4 Lolita or *kawaii* fashion brands

Angelic Pretty (7), 6%DOKIDOKI (3), Baby (3), Spank pour fairly (2), Swimmer, Milk, Maniaque, h.naoto, sanrio, Alice and the pirates, Metamorphose, BtssB.

These respondents are a long way from *kawaii* represented in the Japanese media and are limited to the world of Lolita or *kawaii* fashion, such as the lifestyle, wearing the clothes, fashion characters, and fashion brands. Japanese popular culture, such as manga, the childish universe, singers wearing Harajuku *kawaii* fashion such as *Moon Kana*, and *Kyari pyamu pyamu*, Misako Aoki, who represents Japanese Lolita fashion, are considered cute by French people.

What is *kawaii* in Japan? *Kawaii* is an aesthetic term associated with immaturity or the childish. However, in Japanese society this adjective has several meanings. *Kawaii* designates not only immaturity but also an aesthetic, according to context. The adjective *Kawaii*, when used in Japanese fashion magazines, is used in relation to mature women. In 2006, in a special issue, the Japanese fashion magazine *Anan* (April 19 2006) gave a new definition of *kawaii*. In this magazine Japanese actress Kimura Yoshino, who is considered a symbol of *kawaii*, defined it as a notion for mature women, saying “I think that only mature women” who possess inner reserves could express real *kawaii* without hesitation. Another Japanese fashion magazine “story” aimed at 40-year-olds published a special issue on cuteness for mature women, of which title was “Let’s Show the *Kawaii* of Mature Women”.

But after six years of *kawaii* culture being diffused and become popular in foreign countries, *Anan* published a special on *kawaii* the title of which was “Kawaii in the World”. The representative *kawaii* woman is no longer Kimura Yoshino but now *Kyari pyamu pyamu*, whom French Lolita wearers mentioned as a *kawaii* person when answering the questionnaire. This issue dealt largely with *kawaii* Japan as acculturated by the foreign countries, a subject not dealt with in previous issue. That is, the *kawaii* constructed by France (and another foreign countries) as immaturity. This aspect of popular culture influences *kawaii* in Japan and Japan itself forms its identity through this version of *kawaii*. Even to the extent that the Japanese government appointed three Japanese girls as *kawaii* ambassadors to diffuse Japanese *kawaii* culture to the world after the boom. Which is to say that the representation of the immaturity of Japan by foreign countries could be re-acculturated as Japanese identity by Japan itself. The intercultural stereotype risks becoming the device by which identity is made in the global and transnational communication age.

### **Conclusion: Could we find some Japaneseness in *Kawaii* Fashion Worn by French Girls? What is the Japaneseness in the Wearing of this Lolita Fashion?**

It could be concluded from the analysis of my respondents’ answers/discourses that wearers recognise/represent some Lolita/*kawaii* fashion as fashion outside the French norm, as a Japanese style, as exotic, immature, as seen by wearers and onlookers around them; they consider this style to be



European and part of their identity, seeing the ‘I’, i.e., the self as the subject, as exotic and outside the norm, and the ‘me’, i.e., the self as object. Because public eyes see that *kawaii* fashion is exotic, even if *kawaii* wearers consider it a non-Japanese style, it could be said that the identity is constructed as a symbolic interaction, i.e., Japaneseness is constructed by symbolic interaction between wearers and observers in France, and this Japaneseness is again acculturated by the Japanese media as mentioned above, and self-orientalism is realised.

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## Summary

Since the 1990s when Japanese popular culture, such as manga, extravagant street fashion, video games, etc. were exported to the world, the term ‘*kawaii*’ has also appeared in Europe, in particular in France, one of the countries that has absorbed Japanese popular culture the most. I have examined how the term *kawaii*, one of the key words of Japanese popular culture as disseminated in foreign countries, adds a new semiotic value to images of Japan in France from several points of view. These points of view come from ‘onlookers’ as well as wearers: for example, I have used analysis of media (newspapers, fashion magazines, Internet magazines, books, etc.), and interviews with French, Lithuanian, South Korean and Taiwanese students interested in Japanese language and culture (Koma 2011, 2012), in order to make clear if

the term *kawaii* will be accepted in France with the same meaning as it has in Japan, and to understand how European countries acculturate *kawaii* in each social context. Through my previous research, I conclude that the acculturation of *kawaii* could be considered exoticism-orientalism for the French, who have a heritage of Japonism-Orientalism-exoticism from the end of the 19th century. *Kawaii* in Europe does not correspond to *kawaii* in Japan; *kawaii* is a persistent stereotype (that of immaturity) relating to Japan. To examine my hypothesis further, in this paper, I will examine how *kawaii* is represented by Lolita Fashion wearers (considered one of the *kawaii* fashions) through interviews with them in France. Through analysis of various levels of discourse (the media, wearers of *kawaii* fashion, *kawaii* fashion admirers), I intend to make the representation of *kawaii* in France clear from the point of view of communication studies.

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## Santrauka

Nuo 9 dešimtmečio japonų populiarioji kultūra – komiksai (*manga*), ekstravagantiška gatvės mada, video žaidimai ir t. t. – buvo pradėta aktyviai eksportuoti į visą pasaulį. Tuo pat metu Europoje atsirado terminas *kawaii*, kuris ypač įsitvirtino Prancūzijoje – vienoje iš šalių, kuriai itin didelę įtaką padarė japonų populiarioji kultūra. Straipsnyje nagrinėjama, kaip *kawaii* – viena iš pagrindinių japonų populiariosios kultūros sąvokų užsienio valstybėse – kuria naują Japonijos įvaizdžio Prancūzijoje semiotinę reikšmę iš kelių skirtingų nuomonių. Tai ir stebėtojų, ir pačioje kultūroje dalyvaujančiųjų nuomonės. Pavyzdžiui, aš analizavau žiniasklaidą (laikraščius, mados žurnalus, internetinius žurnalus, knygas, t. t.) ir interviu, darytus su Prancūzijos, Lietuvos, Pietų Korėjos ir Taivano studentais, kurie domisi japonų kalba ir kultūra (Koma 2011, 2012), tam, kad išsiaiškintčiau, ar *kawaii* terminas Prancūzijoje turės tokią pačią prasmę, kaip ir Japonijoje. Straipsnyje taip pat siekiama atsakyti, kaip Europos valstybės sukultūrino *kawaii* savo socialiniame kontekste. Ankstesniame savo tyrime aš priėjau prie išvados, kad prancūzai, kurie nuo 19 a. pabaigos turi japonistikos, orientalizmo, egzotizmo palikimą, *kawaii* sukultūrinimą galėtų laikyti egzotizmu-orientalizmu. *Kawaii* Europoje neatitinka *kawaii* Japonijoje reikšmės: Europoje *kawaii* yra stabiliai egzistuojantis nesubrendimo stereotipas, siejamas su Japonija. Toliau siekdama patvirtinti savo hipotezę šiame straipsnyje analizuosiu, kaip *kawaii* yra reprezentuojamas Lolitos mados (kuri laikoma viena iš *kawaii* madų) atstovų. Analizuodama įvairius diskurso lygius (žiniasklaidą, *kawaii* mados atstovus, *kawaii* mados gerbėjus), ketinu, pasitelkdama komunikacijos studijas, pateikti aiškų *kawaii* Prancūzijoje vaizdą.