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#3 Bi-weekly Report

**Cuties in Japan**

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In the 1980’s *kawaii* style was prominent in Japanese pop culture. The term “*kawaii”* typically means very cute and childlike, and basically implies innocent, naive, inexperienced etc.

*Kawaii* products were usually assorted with other popular and fashionable accessories. According to the author, individuals between the ages of 18 and 30 were quite fond of cute people and things during this particular time period (p. 220, para 2). The meaning of this fairly modern style is an extension of the term “shy” or “vulnerable”.

Examples of kawaii can be seen in writing (originating in the 1970’s), using elements of childlike characters, such as stars and hearts. This type of writing was implemented in comic books, computer software, toys, and many other items. According to his research, Yamane Kazuma theorized that teenagers had unknowingly developed this writing style, calling it their own preferable technique of writing (p. 222, para 2). He also supports the idea that the youth were rebelling against traditional Japanese culture and mimicking that, which was popular within European culture. It gave them a sense of having more freedom to express themselves and communicate with others.

Cute culture was birth mainly from teenage girls. Around this time period, the use of new slang words began being utilized within the vocabulary of incoming high schoolers. Words such as *kakkoii* (cool), were altered to *katchoii,* and were made to sound like baby-talk. Marketing industries took advantage of the booming cuteness culture and bean to market products such as *manga* and holiday and greeting cards, to the public and profit from it. These products became known as *fancy goods*. Anybody could purchase fancy goods in their local town stores. There was this unfamiliarity with the style and feel of these new products found in traditional Japan. Many of these items were sold and presented at public events, theatres, malls, and galleries. One obvious trait or distinction that can be seen in many of these products is the positive and happy style or design, producing an uplifting feeling to the consumer. *Kawaii* can also be seen in other goods such as clothing, food, cute idols, and even in cute ideas.

The cutie-culture allows participants to reminisce and part-take in childhood nostalgia. This experience has also been appreciated by modern European culture. This type of escapism, has given Europeans the opportunity to free themselves spiritually from impoverished conditions created by industrialization and urbanization. With the developments of creative aesthetics, both American and Japanese culture has developed individual and idealistic sentiments valuable by society. For example, in the U.S. Walt Disney created cartoons and films using themes that were once popular in folklore, such as elements of rural America, whereas in Japan, idealized childhood became the sentimental obsession. In his surveys, Kazuma explains that most of the responses given about adulthood were perceived as being negative and much less optimistic than that of their childhood expectations. So, there is this constant longing for the past and time of innocence.

One of the most contributing factors of cute culture is women and girls. Initially males were usually passive to participation, but by the 1980’s more men began to partake in the evolution of cute culture. Japanese conservatives have negatively commented on the “girly-like” appearances of young men and condemned the dominant culture of young girls because they perceive it as a threat to the moral fiber of traditional Japanese culture. This type of culture symbolizes and represents individual freedom for young women, and young men are nothing remotely close to exemplifying the “ideal male dominant role” within Japanese society. The men also experience personal freedom from the demands and expectations of society in cute culture.

Through the consumption of cute goods and preconceived ideas, the youth enter in the world of cute culture, which ultimately results in an expensive and unrealistic type of lifestyle which can be both detrimental and beneficial to the individual. *“ In practice, the present tendency to shelve all distinctions- of adult and child, male and female, cultured and uncultured, east and west- in favor of a universal form of childish amae can only be called a regression for mankind”*(Doi, p.251, para 2). I would have to agree with Takeo Doi, that individuals are able to regress back to their childhood while they are actively participating in cute culture. This choice of lifestyle is an opportunistic way for them to avoid facing the reality of adulthood. It is a form of escapism and fantasy world created to appease those persons who feel they are not ready to pursue the demands of society; which they eventually will have to do.