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What's Behind the Fetishism of Japanese School Uniforms?

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Military-style uniform is an icon of modern Japanese culture. It has been as ubiquitous to dress culture in Japan as *blue jeans* have been to America. It has represented an alternative mode of dress that has, to some extent, helped to mediate between the strictly divided categories of either "traditional" Japanese clothing or "Western" clothing. The military-style uniform is understood as being both distinctively Japanese *and* distinctively modern. In antique photographs and in contemporary illustrations, characters in school uniform often appear alongside characters wearing kimono or *yukata*. In the twentieth century both traditional dress and the military-style uniform are self-consciously Japanese, and by extension both are distinctively modern modes of dressing.

An examination of the range of different social contexts and cultural forms in which the military-style uniform appears in twentieth-century Japan gives the impression that, in the collective imagination of the nation, the uniformed individual has come to represent the example *par excellence* of the modern subject. This article traces the conceptual history of the uniform in Japan: from its first inception as military apparel—through its association with the post-war avant-garde—homoeroticism—biker gangs—its reappearance in the *oeuvre* exploiting the Lolita complex—till finally arriving at the media obsession with high-school girls in uniform in the 1990s. Revisiting the original values attached to the Japanese military-style uniform in the Meiji period sheds necessary light on the deeper meaning of and reasons for contemporary uniform fetishism.

Modernism and Militarism and Uniform

The cult of the military-style uniform is about the nature of the relationship between the individual in uniform and external sources of power. Its existence in post-war Japan suggests that there has been a close relationship between the development of modernism (and the modern Japanese subject) and the development of Japan as a visible military force from the late nineteenth century on. This could be interpreted to mean simply that modern Japan developed into a highly disciplined and militarized society in which good citizens were ultimately soldiers.[1] Evidence exists to suggest that this was indeed the case. In an article published in *Taiyô* in 1897 the author states that: ". . . just being born and raised in this country is not enough for the masses to be considered citizens *(kokumin)*. The prerequisite of citizenship is a sound sense of nation *(kokkateki kannen)* . . ." (Gluck 1985: 25). The shaping of the modern subject was, from its outset, closely tied to nationalism and soldiering.

Putting discipline to one side for a moment, another aspect of military uniform is *display*. Military uniform is the ultimate form of modern dress worn to impress a foreign national gaze. As is now well documented, modern society in Japan developed under circumstances in which it was especially conscious of being observed and judged by foreign powers, especially America, France and Britain. As Japan has developed internally it has been accompanied by the sometimes overwhelming sense that it is being observed, constantly, by an invisible eye: the disciplinary gaze of an intellectual authority, located overseas. In *Comments on the 1891 Imperial Rescript of Education (Chokugo Engi)*, commissioned by the Ministry of Education, Inoue Tetsujiro talked about precisely this sense of performed modernization:

> Although we should always endeavour to conduct friendly relations with the powers, *foreign enemies are watching* for any lapse on our part, and then we can rely only on our forty million fellow

> countrymen. Thus any true Japanese must have a sense of public duty, by which he values his life as lightly as dust, advances spiritedly, and is ready to sacrifice himself for the sake of the nation (Gluck 1985: 130, my italics).

The modern citizen dressed in uniform, partly to meet the gaze of foreign powers, became the model subject of Meiji society. In uniform Japanese citizens could, in the same gesture, be both "publicly accountable" (Joseph 1992: 50) and internationally accountable. It is not difficult to see why the military uniform cladding the body of the Japanese soldier, on display to the world, became highly significant—and peculiarly eroticized—under the watchful gaze not only of Japan's own intelligentsia and governing elites, but those of foreign powers also.

In the first half of the twentieth century the uniformed subject was represented mainly by soldiers and sailors in the Imperial Army and Navy. In the post-war period the subject in uniform has been represented mainly by schoolchildren in uniforms. As we shall see later, these school uniforms are actually junior, civilian versions of the official military apparel of late nineteenth-century Japan. In a demilitarized post-war society, the significance of military uniforms and soldiers has become increasingly vague and historical. Instead the national school uniform and the schoolchildren who wear them have taken on the symbolic weight previously attached to military uniform and the armed forces.

Militarism and National Education

Alongside the conscript army established in 1872, elementary schools constituted the most pervasive tutelary apparatus of the Meiji state. Citizen-making, universal elementary education, and military training became interrelated aspects of modernization. Unsurprising, therefore, that the first Rescript produced by the Meiji government was the *Rescript of Soldiers and Sailors* published in 1885, and the second was the 1891 *Imperial Rescript of Education*. The *Rescript of Education* was both a founding document defining the structure of the modern Japanese state and the obligations of its citizens, and simultaneously an educational material taught by rote in Japanese schools for the next four decades.

The boys' school uniform was originally designed as a junior equivalent of the late nineteenth-century Japanese army uniform *(Fukusô* 1969: 127), which was itself influenced by both the French army uniform of the 1860s and the Prussian army uniform of the 1870s (Kitamura 1996). The first boys' school uniform (originally accompanied by long Prussian-style capes) was worn to school in 1879 *(Fukusô* 1969: 127).

Girls' school uniforms, though not widely worn until forty years later, in the 1920s (Satô 1976:6), were designed in a complementary fashion, as junior feminine equivalents of the Japanese navy uniform. Schoolgirls' uniforms became known as "sailor suits" *(se-ra-fuku)*, and the origins

of their design can be traced back to the nineteenth-century English navy, the apparel of which was the principal model for the design of the Japanese navy uniform. (During the 1930s some Japanese naval cadets called their uniforms *jonbera*, a reference to "John Bull;" meaning England, the origin of their design.[2])

Early resistance to the introduction of a modern Western-style uniform for Japanese schoolgirls was eventually countered by the physical impracticality of early twentieth-century girls' school uniforms based on the kimono (especially after the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1925 [Nakata 1973: 67]); and also by the desire of the government to counter the increasing use made of "casual" Western-style fashion by young women in the 1920s.[3] During this decade a "uniform system" (*seifuku seidō*) was institutionalized in different areas of Japanese social life, from middle schools, to department stores (Skov and Moeran 1995: 16), to public services, with the support of the Ministry and Education and Culture *(Fukusō* 1969: 576). By the 1930s most schoolgirls were wearing the "sailor suit" to and from school.

Between 1903 and the Pacific War, schools used all manner of official government texts as their basic teaching material. From 1925 military officers were assigned to every elementary school in Japan to improve the quality of elementary military training. During the Pacific War in particular, schoolchildren were seen largely as soldiers, sailors and airmen in training.

The Japanese Imperial Army and Navy were rapidly dismantled after the 1945 Potsdam Treaty signed at the end of the Pacific War. The institutional vacuum opened by the loss of the army encouraged post-war governments to place a high degree of political importance on the school system. In the 1950s state schools became the principal institutional means of social regulation. While surviving soldiers and airmen were demobbed, schoolchildren continued to fall under the close management of government institutions. Instead of *kokutai*—the Imperial "family state," post-war society was identified as *gakureki shakai*—the "educationalist society."

In terms of dress culture the official school uniform also continued to look approximately like the pre-war military-style school uniform. Schoolchildren clad in uniform, and highly visible on the streets, became living symbols of the integrated pre-war Japanese political system. Children in uniform became a visual trigger reminding people of the pre-war army, education system and society. For this reason, in the *drama* of post-war culture it sometimes appears as if the only *real* national subjects *(kokumin)* or full citizens of Japan, are in fact schoolchildren in uniform.

School Uniforms in Post-war Culture

Though the subjectivity embodied is radically different to that of the militarized subject of pre-war Japan, the military-style uniform has emerged

in post-war culture as a key symbol, and anti-symbol, of the political system and the education system. A fashion for military-style uniforms emerged in Japan at approximately the same time as the spread of *blue jeans* across America, Europe and parts of the Third World, during the 1960s. While American working men's *blue jeans* were first adopted as a fashion statement by artists, motorcycle gangs, and hippies (Davis 1992: 68–77), the Japanese school and military uniform became an important outfit for underground and avant-garde circles from the 1970s.

Contradicting, faintly, the notion that uniforms foster spiritual uniformity among those wearing them, military uniform in contemporary Japanese culture has been linked to stories with extremely strong characters. Uniformed characters are frequently heroic, tragic, passionate, uncontainable. Overall, the impression given is that Japanese people in uniform have an intense subjective presence. A presence far greater, in fact, than that of individuals in casual clothes, who appear positively vapid by comparison. Individuals in uniform appear to experience the most extreme neuroses and anxieties. They are shown to experience characteristic modes of dysfunctionality, disconnection, despair, or desire, which symbolize the political tensions and complications of modernity in Japan. In post-war culture uniformed individuals appear to represent the very core and complex of contemporary subjectivity (see Figure 1).

Pictures of clean, neat, and morally wholesome schoolchildren in uniforms have pervaded family advertising and television viewing from the beginning of the post-war period. Their plump puritan appearances hint at Japanese borrowing from the moral wonderland of post-war America of the 1950s. Contented schoolchildren in impeccable uniforms have been particularly associated with nostalgic media memories of the 1950s. They have also appeared on stamps and in government poster campaigns, as severe and officious angels, delivering the standards of appropriate public behavior (see Figure 2). The presence within post-war pornography of the same wholesome and innocent schoolgirls in sailor suits is almost certainly related to their officially chaste character. Uniformed schoolgirls have appeared in novels, erotic *manga*, illustrations, photo magazines, and videos, and on internet sites (see Figure 3). Pornographic novels about schoolgirls unbuttoning their blouses have been a staple of the pulp publishing mill since the 1950s.

On the other hand the Japanese schoolboy (or young soldier) in uniform forms one of the recurrent themes of Japanese gay pornography and literature. The cult of the young Japanese boy in uniform occurs at precisely the point where two historico-cultural themes briefly converge: the Pacific War and homosexual desire. This convergence is perhaps illustrated by the high aesthetic and military activity of the homosexually inclined novelist Mishima Yukio in the late 1960s, or Oshima Nagisa's film *Merry Christmas Mr Lawrence* (1983), which features homoerotic tension in Japanese prisoner-of-war camps. The eroticized schoolboy in uniform has also been a recurring avant-garde character (see Figure 4).

Figure 1
Girl in sailor uniform gropes a doll dressed in kimono, 1970. Courtesy of the artist Saeki Toshio, re-published in *The Early Works*, 1997, Tokyo: Treville Co. Ltd.

Between 1978 and 1983, members of the pioneering pop-band *YMO (Yellow Magic Orchestra)* wore the Japanese schoolboys' uniform for publicity shots and concerts, as did many subsequent pop-stars influenced by their style.

Erotic-grotesque Schoolchildren

From the late 1960s the alternately erotic and chaste images of schoolgirls appearing in pornography and official state culture respectively were

Figure 2
Schoolgirl in uniform on a Tokyo subway poster warning men that *chikan* (sexual harassment) on trains is a crime. Photograph by Sharon Kinsella, 1998.

joined by more complex erotic-grotesque (*eroguro*) images. The late 1960s and 1970s counter-culture produced extreme images of schoolgirls being seduced or raped by monsters, schoolmasters or elderly relatives (see Figure 5).

In contemporary drama, such as Takatori Ei's *Sei Mikaera Gakuen*, written in 1982, entire casts have been composed of sadistic schoolchildren in uniform. Schoolchildren in uniform are driven by appalling desires to destroy or be destroyed in Maruo Suehiro's erotic-grotesque

Figure 3
Cover of porn magazine featuring schoolgirl types. *Pixie 17*, 1998, Tokyo: Bauhaus Shuppan.

manga. It is notable that school uniforms and schoolchildren themselves are often blurred with images of military uniforms and soldiers from the Pacific War period in the avant-garde imagination (see Figure 6).

A similar nihilism can be seen in the work of the late female *manga* artist Yamada Hanako, in which she featured herself as a neurotic, depressed, uniformed schoolgirl with alternately malicious and masochistic desires. Yamada committed suicide in 1992. Images of pristine schoolchildren in a state of surreal sexual and behavioral disarray have been used to express cynical attitudes towards post-war morality. In

Figure 4
Male student melodramatics in the 1970s. Courtesy of artist Maruo Suehiro, and published on the dust jacket of *National Kid*, 1989, Tokyo: Seirindo.

counter-culture the supposedly innocent schoolgirl in uniform has been treated with suspicion. The schoolgirl and her sailor suit have been drawn as if they were a mask. Sometimes an insidious matriarchal, bureaucratic, or military power is imagined lurking under the swinging pigtails.

Bad Girls Eclipse Bad Boys

School uniforms have also been central to the street styles created by various post-war boys' youth cultures. From the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s teenage boys in motorbike gangs (*bôsôzoku*) wore customized high-school uniforms known as *gakuran*, with headbands and girls' slip-on sandals, and other items. Customized school blazers were called *choran*, *churan* and *yoran*, depending on their length (Sato 1991). They were often worn with baggy school pants known as *bontan*. Dropout and delinquent schoolboys (*yankees*) have also worn their own version of "cocky" (*tsuppari*) uniforms, with tapering baggy pants.

During the 1980s, however, culture based around real gangs of dropout schoolboys in uniform (such as the *Nameneko* "Cocky Cat" craze of

Figure 5
A perverse schoolgirl is fondled by a leering schoolmaster with an axe in his head, 1970. Courtesy of the artist Saeki Toshio, *The Early Works*, 1997.

1981, featuring kittens dressed up in miniature dropout uniforms and bandanas) were slowly replaced with images of deviant schoolgirls. In 1981 Kadokawa Taro's film *Sailor Suit and Machine Gun (Se-ra-fuku to Kikanju)*, about a schoolgirl in uniform who wields a machine gun and leads a *yakuza* gang, became a national box office hit. This shift in focus away from deviant schoolboys and towards deviant schoolgirls may simply reflect the more generalized gender switch within culture, away from young boys *(shônen)* and towards young women *(shôjo)*, which took place in the 1980s.

Broadcast at 5 p.m. every night the popular Fuji television show *Sunset Kittens (Yuyaku Nyan Nyan)*, turned amateur schoolgirls, fresh from the playground and still in their uniforms, into television idols in 1985. Two years later Uchida Shungiku's *shôjo manga* (girl's comic) classic, *The Illusory Ordinary Girl (Maboroshi no Futsu Shojo*, 1987), told the story of a high-school girl who drinks, smokes, and sleeps around. Through the lead character Uchida offered readers the wisdom that the notion of the good and innocent "ordinary girl" is an idiocy.

Lolita Complex

In the 1980s the little girl in a school uniform also became the central object of desire of Lolita complex pornography and Science Fiction. Azuma Hideo's erotic manga fantasy, *Hizashi*, featuring a little girl in

Figure 6
A schoolboy and schoolgirl in uniform strangle and sexually assault each other on a Pacific War battlefield, 1989. Courtesy of the artist Maruo Suehiro, *National Kid*, Tokyo: Seirindo.

school uniform, remains the "bible" of Lolita complex subculture (see Figure 7). It is the large number of men, now in their thirties, with *otaku* cultural tastes and habits who form both the audience for Lolita complex culture and a large secondary audience for *manga*, animation, and pop-idols ostensibly produced for children.[4] Well-known examples of animated *manga* series featuring schoolgirl super-heroes that have attracted a mixed audience of little girls and adult men are Sakura Momoko's *Chibi Maruko Chan*, televised in 1990 and Takeuchi Naoko's *Sailor Moon*, first published in 1992.

During the 1990s, *otaku* culture, which was based mainly on the media of amateur *manga*, CD Rom and animation during the 1980s, moved on to the internet. The majority of private Japanese internet home pages and websites are devoted to talking about schoolgirls. Mainichi newspaper

Figure 7
Lolita runs through a fantastic forest of penises before she remembers she has to somehow get to school. Courtesy of the artist Azuma Hideo, published in *Hizashi*, 1982.

cyber-reporters estimated in 1998 that approximately 80 per cent of "underground" internet sites (sites for which the URL is not listed on search engines) designed in Japan are also based on the topic of schoolgirls and the schoolgirl uniform.

High-school Girl Boom

A voyeuristic interest in *real* schoolgirls in uniform began to emerge during the 1980s. In 1985, Mori Nobuyuki published the *Tokyo High School*

Girl Uniform Fieldbook (Tokyo Joshiko Seifuku Rankai), a combined work of academic ethnography and sexual fetishism, which features detailed line drawings of the official uniforms of different high-school girls in Tokyo. It also includes neat ethnographic field-maps showing the location of their respective schools. The book, which has since become a cult classic, reflects the extent of the intellectual and methodological overlap between amateur *otaki*sm and official academic research.

Subculture about high-school girls and sailor suits was further stimulated by the introduction of "designer uniforms" in many of Tokyo's private high schools during the second half of the 1980s. This was a strategy employed by schools in an attempt to maintain the numbers of their pupils in a period of demographic decline in the school-age population. Most private girls schools launched new uniforms with tartan check skirts, well-cut jackets and blouses. An element of *fashion* was added to an area of dress that had originally been conceived as a form of anti-fashion (Across 1995: 236–9).

In 1993 it came to the attention of the national news media that a new sex industry had emerged that was focused exclusively on schoolgirls. This industry was based around "bloomer sailor" *(buruse-ra)* shops catering to men with a sexual fixation on the paraphernalia of high-school girls' uniforms. ("Bloomers," in this case, are dark-colored sports pants worn by schoolgirls for physical education.) Schoolgirls were selling off items of their school uniforms, their own used knickers, and gobs of their saliva, to the proprietors of these makeshift shops, for quick cash.

In 1994 the media interest in "bloomer sailor shops" transferred itself to a far greater scandal concerning the immoral behavior of schoolgirls. Immense media, government, and academic interest was stimulated by the apparent involvement of schoolgirls in a new form of amateur prostitution referred to as "assisted dating" *(enjo kôsai)*. *Enjo kôsai* was often abbreviated in speech to the cuter sounding "*enkô*," and written in shorthand simply as the *katakana* vowel "*e*." For the media, schoolgirls, and the general public, *enkô* became a keyword of the mid-1990s. Images of high-school girls dallying on the streets, working in sex industry establishments, or phoning telephone chat-lines *(terekura)* flooded into the media. The intense interest taken in high-school girls by the culture business sector, during the mid-1990s, was appropriately labeled the "high-school girl boom."

Televisual Scrutiny of Schoolgirls

Between 1995 and 1998 real schoolgirls in uniform became a perpetual presence on national television. Schoolgirls appeared in serious news reports, documentary programs, educational programs, wide shows, and chat shows. They were frequently filmed from the bottom up, with the camera focused mainly on their legs and skirts. The identities of their

faces and voices were often disguised with screen pixelation and voice synthesizers. The girls appeared as blurred and shifting impressions of flesh with squeaky computerized voices and autonomous naked legs. Newspaper and television journalists, newscasters, and anchormen jostled with each other for the opportunity to push microphones in front of schoolgirl faces and absorb whatever they might have to say for themselves.

Camera crews, journalists and magazine editors made encampments on the main streets of Shibuya, in order to search for high-school girls to investigate, interview, film, photograph. In 1996 and 1997 anything up to four different television camera crews could be found shooting on Center Gai shopping street in Shibuya, or outside the youth-oriented *109 (maru-kyû)* department store. Typically schoolgirls were asked to open and empty their handbags on camera to show the camera crew, researcher, or magazine editor their personal possessions. Contents would be tipped on to a deep red blanket placed on the ground. Viewers would be informed how much money and what brands of goods the schoolgirls had in their possession, and encouraged to imagine how the money to buy these (expensive) things was earned or come by.[5] The luxurious tastes of schoolgirls would be described in excited and exaggerated terms. The main emphasis in the media treatment of high-school girls was a criticism of their materialism and apparently overwhelming desire to get money at any cost (see Figure 8).

Girls dressed in *kogal* style were routinely described as if they were prostitutes, using their mobile phones, PHS hand sets, and pocket bells, in conjunction with personal ads, telephone chat lines *(terekura)*, and *dengon dial* (personal ads on voice mail), to find and meet older customers. Funds raised from amateur "dates" were said to be used by

Figure 8
"Okanemochi ni naritai!" (I wanna get rich!): an impudent schoolgirl is placed in the limelight in a stage-managed television show, 1997. Photograph by Sharon Kinsella.

schoolgirls to fulfill their only desire, which was the desire to own brand name goods. Buying, acquiring, and selling, in general, became strangely fashionable concepts. They were referred to by the clever new slang words *geto* (get) and *uri* (sell). These keywords derived their pleasing clinical *frisson* from the fact that they explicitly blurred any distinction between buying and selling *goods* and buying and selling *people*.

Making a crossover from buying to selling, many intellectuals suggested that the concept "high-school girl" had itself become a kind of unofficial brand label. It was suggested that by attaching the phrase "high-school girl" *(joshi kôsei)* to any product it would automatically sell better. A whole range of new products, from tamagotchi, to print club *(purikura)* machines,[6] to mobile phones, to cameras, or disposable computers, were linked to gregarious high-school girls. Another tangent to the idea that high-school girls were a brand label, was that high-school girls were themselves a brand-name good. High-school girls represented a particular and a purchasable brand of companionship. A fact much repeated in the media was that dates with girls commanded different prices according to their school year and the school they attended.

Kogal Culture

In the same period a new street style emerged in Tokyo, which appeared, increasingly, throughout its duration between 1995 and 1998, to be a series of self-conscious responses to media images and debate about high-school girls (see Figure 9).

Figure 9
Kogal posing with their own cameras for photo-journalists. Parco plaza at Kichijoji, West Tokyo, 1997. Photograph by Maggie Lambert.

Schoolgirls involved in high-school girl subculture became universally known as *kogal*—a condensation of "high school" *(kôkô)* and "gal." They gathered on the public plazas and in the department stores of Shibuya, Ikebukuro and Shinjuku. *Kogal* fashion had two interchangeable sets of apparel—customized school uniforms, and a style with no specific name other than *o'share* (showy), *cho-kawaii* (super-cute), *kitsch*, or *shitagi-kei* (lingerie style), but which might be more succinctly described as a mode of "prostitute-chic."

School uniforms worn in the *kogal* style resembled the semi-naked images of schoolgirls in sailor suits that have long featured in pornography for older men. School skirts were made into miniskirts by rolling up the waistband to hoist up the hem. Instead of regulation school socks *kogal* wore "loose socks," worn, as the name suggests, crumpled around their shins. "Loose socks" suggested laxness: a contradiction of the formal expectation that school girls should be impeccably neat and perfectly pure.[7] In cold weather doughty *kogal* also wore Burberry scarves: usually a mustard-colored scarf in a check pattern with red, white and black stripes, worn tucked into their school blazers (the point of conception of a global fashion interest in Burberry checks). Other *kogal* accessories included super-cute (*chô-kawaii*) and superbly retro Hello Kitty paraphernalia and mobile phone cases.

Kogal after-hours *o'share* apparel was mature, semi-classical, and showy (see Figure 10). They wore slender full-length coats with fur collars, over mini skirts and slinky dresses, micro-shorts, or tight-fitting ladies' trouser suits. The materials used were generally cheap imitations of expensive materials, such as silky acrylic shirts in prints reminiscent of Hermes silk scarf designs (the original Hermes designs in fact already incorporate printed images of shining solid gold chains and pendants). The kitsch, showy style gave the girls the general flavor of high-class hookers in a 1970s New York film set.

The gaudy, new-money look was accessorized with salon suntans, elaborate and multicolored "nail art" manicures, temporary tattoos, and hair heavily streaked with whitish blonde flashes *(meshu)*, or tinted brown *(chapatsu)*. Utilizing these accessories, cameras and mirrors *kogal* made heavy-handed performances of vanity and preening while squatting on the streets (see Figure 11). *Kogal* fashion contained hints of a form of ironic retro materialism. The theme of staged and conspicuous flashiness in *kogal* culture made a mimicry of the media image of the materialistic high-school girl prostituting herself for money.

While *kogals* enjoyed wearing these showy clothes while they were hanging out on the streets or meeting their boyfriends, it was schoolgirls in uniforms worn with loose socks and mini skirts that remained the recurring image of high-school girls in the media.

Kogal fashion and street style was promoted in a new generation of magazines targeted at high-school girls, including *Egg, Cawaii, Happie, Tokyo Street News, Zettai Suki Suki, Heart Candy*, and *Street Jam*. All

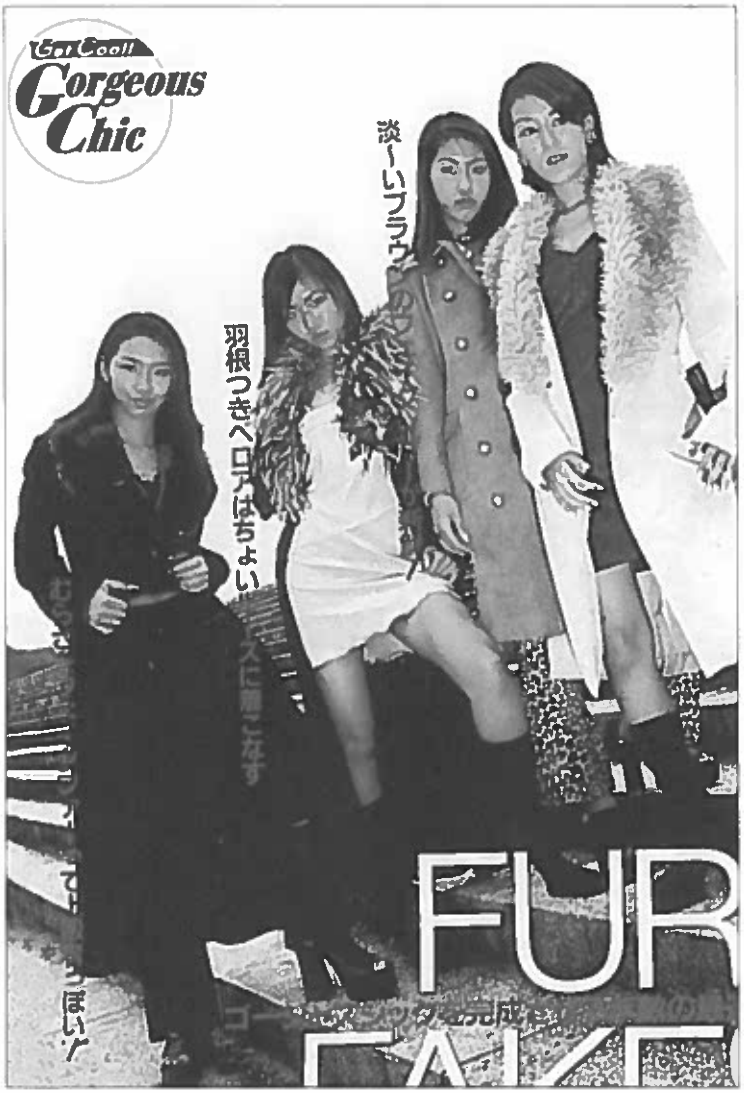

Figure 10
Schoolgirl prostitute chic, styled by *Cawaii* magazine, 1998.

of these magazines were launched in 1996 and 1997. By Summer 1998 the last three magazines had already been discontinued. *Street Jam* and *Heart Candy*, launched in 1997, after the initial success of *Egg*, the leading *kogal* magazine, were produced in the offices of publishing companies such as Eichi and Bauhaus, otherwise specializing in the production of schoolgirl and Lolita complex pornographic magazines. In these magazines' editorials the distinction between staple pornographic images of schoolgirls in uniform for older male audiences, and the new images of schoolgirls being willfully lewd for an admiring schoolgirl audience, threatened to disappear. In other words the gap between the older male

Figure 11
Kogal posing with a mirror. Parco Plaza, Kichijoji, West Tokyo, 1997. Photograph by Maggie Lambert.

image of the schoolgirl as a sex object, and the schoolgirls' own subjective image of themselves, had begun to close.

All these magazines established a pattern of close interaction with schoolgirls themselves. *Cawaii*'s editorials invited schoolgirls into its offices in the *Shufu no Tomo (Housewife's Friend)* building. Its desks were habitually crowded with schoolgirls preening themselves and proudly chatting to (older male) editors. In the editorial office the girls were provided with sofas on which to lounge, and a print club *(purikura)* machine, to make them feel at home. *Heart Candy* magazine went a stage further and actually recruited high-school girls, aged between 18 and 20, to serve as its main editorial staff. The editor-in-chief was 23 years old. Through the course of the high-school girl boom, high-school girl magazine *(joshi kôsei muke zasshi)* editorials gradually became the organizational center of *kogal* culture.

High-school Girls and Locating Society

Discussion about subjects from personal dating clubs and personal listings magazines (such as *Jamaru)*, to brand-name goods, the internet, censorship, crime, drugs, mobile phones, and the generality of post-modern society, became inextricably linked with high-school girls. The extent of the high-school girl theme in culture, reportage and social theory produced in the period between 1994 and 1998 made it appear as if almost the whole of contemporary social and political debate in turn-of-the-century Japan had to be somehow filtered through the personality of a high-school

girl. It appeared that the schoolgirl in uniform had been isolated as the most perfect example of the state of the modern Japanese subject.

High-school girls were fascinating because they appeared to hold the key to what was happening in society on a subjective level. They become strongly associated with "society" and "reality." A great deal of emphasis was placed on the earthiness, realness, robustness, exuberance, spontaneity, and refreshing unpredictability of high-school girls. Schoolgirls presented as the very essence of contemporary social life helped to give intellectuals and cultural producers a sense of their bearings. The fleshy reality of high-school girls gave the intellectuals and media a reassuring sense of being accompanied by an old-fashioned type of physical social reality.

As it happened, authenticity and gritty realness was a theme that high-school girls themselves did not mind incorporating into their own *kogal* street culture. Some groups of *kogal* took to wearing disheveled oil- and ink-stained school skirts and unsavory-looking school blouses covered in a film of accumulated grime. Others took to wearing dilapidated rubber flip-flops and taking up the unladylike posture of the "shit-squat" *(unko-suwari)* in public places. They cultivated the trappings of Asian industrial workers. In fact squatting on the streets was a habit reminiscent of the affected plebeian coarseness of the boys' motorbike gangs *(bôsôzoku)* of the 1970s.

The "High-school Girl Movement"

Sociologists and producers discovered in high-school girl subculture a "movement" *(joshi kôsei undô)* comparable to that of the student movement of the late 1960s. Though intellectuals and local government officers agreed that high-school girls were the subject of this movement, there were several different conflating lines of thought about what exactly their new subject was doing.

Some cultural producers and journalists supported the cause of the high-school girls. They thought of them, fondly, as a new social force resisting institutionalization. *Kogal* were portrayed as a post-feminist movement coming up from the streets, manifesting the main subjective force in society at the end of the century (see Figure 12). In Harada Masato's film *Bounce Kogal*, released in 1997, for example, high-school girls in loose socks are placed into a dialogue with middle-aged representatives of the 1960s generation of radicals. The three schoolgirl heroines of *Bounce Kogal* argue vehemently with conservative, sexist old men and put a corrupt civil servant out cold with a stun gun. For journalists enthused by the idea of a powerful high-school girl movement, high-school girls have been looked to as a vehicle for social transformation, which could blast the persisting carapace of traditional conservative power off from the top of society.[8]

Figure 12
Guerrilla *kogal* in customized school uniform relaxes with her pistol. Courtesy of the artist Koshiba Tetsuya. Front cover of the *manga* book *Enjo Kosai Bokumetsu Undo* (Assisted Dating Extermination Movement) 1998.

A more ambivalent and futuristic line of reportage has interpreted high-school girl prostitution as a sign of the inevitable defeat of all previous forms of morality and political power. The sociologist Miyadai Shinji became an influential academic with nationwide fame through positioning himself in the media as the leading intellectual medium of high-school girl consciousness. For Miyadai, amateur prostitution could generally be thought of as a positive development, because it ushered in a new era of greater personal and sexual liberty. Miyadai has linked the high-school girl phenomenon to post-modern political debates about the maturation of society, the end of ideology, the "transition from meaning to intensity

of sensation," the end of morality, and the rise of "the never ending everyday" (Miyadai 1997).

One clear subtext of both the left-field interpretation and Miyadai Shinji's more individualistic view of schoolgirl culture is the desire for fundamental and general transformation. Cultural producers and intellectuals have expressed the hope that high-school girls are in the process of re-shaping society, leading cultural production and the retail industry forward, and redesigning the mode of all social relationships in their path. Through this media output a particular group of individuals have projected their own frustrated subjectivity on to the activities of schoolgirls. The novelist and leading opinion-maker Murakami Ryu has published both a novel, *Love & Pop* (reappearing as the feature film, *Love & Pop*, in 1997), and a volume of his own interviews with high-school girls (Murakami 1998). And he has said of them: "The high school girls are unconsciously involved in a kind of movement. To use hyperbole they are spearheading a movement which says 'Do you really think everything is as it should be in Japan? Don't be so complacent'" (Kawai 1997: 47). Fidgeting beneath the upswell of writing and culture about high-school girls are the sentiments of an immobile new power generation, many of whom are employed in the intellectual and cultural industries.

Morality and High-school Girls

A third and more muted response to the media reportage of high-school girls was voiced by intellectuals and members of the public associated with traditionalism and conservative political thought. At this time their view was tagged by the media as the "moral" approach. Moralists were deeply shocked by the vision, real or otherwise, of schoolgirls prostituting themselves. They feared, not that the high-school girls represented a new subjective force that could renew society, but, on the contrary, that high-school girls had lost all manifestation of pride and autonomy. "Assisted dating" was taken as a sign that high-school girls were in danger of losing their independent subjective existence, and were instead becoming molded entirely to an objective environment, surrounding them, in which the only value is exchange value. Moralists feared that there was nothing essentially human (moral) left in society. They saw the nightmare vision of a generation that would enter into intimate relationships with others only to satisfy their financial needs. In this vein Kawai Hayao commented: "Through their actual deeds these girls demonstrate to us the emptiness of soulless relationships" (Kawai 1997: 50). Whereas previously Japanese subjects in military-style uniform were *seen* to dedicate themselves passionately to the defense of Japan, in *fin-de-siècle* Tokyo high-school girls in military-style uniform were seen to have nothing at all of meaning to dedicate themselves to but market forces. In the high-school girl boom

it may be possible to observe the full cycle of a cultural institution: the uniformed citizen of the early twentieth century has finally run his full historical course by transforming into the specter of the high-school girl prostitute in a sailor suit in the 1990s. Schoolgirls in uniform have been elected the living metaphors of a widespread anxiety about the dissolving of citizenship and of the social subject in their entirety as they vanish into the financial interstices of the economy.

Notes

1. In *Uniforms and Nonuniforms*, Nathan Joseph stresses the function of the uniform as a mode of exerting social control (Joseph 1992: 65–84).
2. Personal interview with Iwama Natsuki, President of RISE Corporation, whose grandfather had been a naval officer in the 1930s.
3. Nevertheless, as early as 1928 schoolgirls in Osaka were shortening their skirts to above the knee and acquiring permanent tattoos *(Fukusô* 1969: 47).
4. For more information about *otaku* cultural tastes see Sharon Kinsella: "Amateur Manga Subculture and the *Otaku* Panic" in the *Journal of Japanese Studies*, Summer 1998.
5. It is neither the goal nor the remit of this article to answer questions about whether or not high-school girls actually were engaged in prostitution.
6. Collecting *purikura* stickers became synonymous with high-school girl culture in the mid-1990s. Print club machines are a hybrid of the photo-booth and an upright arcade game. For a standard ¥300 the machines produce a sheet of miniature, identical stickers bearing a comic photograph of the customer(s). By selecting options on the print club sticker machines, customers decorate their own faces with cartoons and captions.
7. "Loose socks" first appeared on the character of the naughty schoolgirl, Miya Chan, in Azuma Hideo's Lolita complex *manga* story *Scrap Gakuen*, written in 1986.
8. Harada, Masato. 1997. *Bounce [Gensaku Shosetsu]*. Tokyo: Dôhosha.

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