

Submissive or Rebellious? The Formation and Popularity of Ryousangata Wotaku's Style

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Abstract:

The popularity of Ryousangata Wotaku's style is a notable phenomenon after the COVID-19 in Tokyo. It cannot be simply attributed to a change in fashion trends. Furthermore, Ryousangata Wotaku's style lacks the distinctly rebellious look that other subculture fashions possess. This unusual but rarely noticed phenomenon intrigued me. Through field research, literature research, and comparative study with other subcultural fashions, I found that Ryousangata Wotakus and young women in Tokyo conformed to the standards of "kawaii" and social expectations to obtain social recognition. However, they also resisted the social pressures and norms and desire to express their individuality. This ambivalence led them to choose and improve the Jirai Kei clothing. These findings underscore the formation and popularity of Ryousangata Wotaku's style is a compromise between conforming to mainstream aesthetics and resisting societal norms and pressures. The study also points to the peculiarity of the pandemic as a tumultuous time – one that has seen a much broader subculture boom than any other era, which is a new perspective for future study.

Keywords:-Ryousangata; Japanese Subculture Study; Gender Study; Social Science; Humanities

1. Introduction

Young women in Tokyo can often be seen wearing complex blouses and skirts adorned with decorations such as ruffles, bows, and lace. They are mainly dressed in pink, light blue, white, and black, and the most typical color combination is the pink blouse and black skirt (Figure 1). They sport sweet and elegant makeup and wear thick-soled shoes, resembling del-

icate dolls produced by a factory. This fashion style, known as "Ryousangata" (量産型), has gained popularity in Tokyo in recent years, originating from subculture influences.



Figure 1. One of the most typical garments in Ryouasangata Wotaku's style¹

Ryouasangata (量産型) originally referred to the current popular “fast fashion” trend, which means “mass-produced”, a term used to describe the mainstream fashion that most women wear,² and did not specifically refer to any particular clothing style.³ It is often used in a derogatory way to describe young women who follow fashion trends closely and therefore wear similar clothes, making them look like they were mass-produced in a factory, and these women are therefore called Ryouasangata Joshi (量産型女子).

Jirai Kei (地雷系) is a subculture fashion trend in Japan, whose name originates from “Jirai Joshi” (地雷女子). It began to gain popularity during the Jirai makeup challenge on the Youtube during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. “Jirai Joshi” roughly originated in Shinjuku (新宿)'s Kabuki-cho (歌舞伎町) in Tokyo in 2010, and this term is often used by Japanese men's magazines to discuss the type of women they consider “too mentally unstable

to date”. These girls often gathered in Kabuki-cho (歌舞伎町) and Harajuku (原宿), wearing black skirts with bows, lace, and ruffles and pink shirts, looking cute but mentally unstable. The personality of these girls was like a landmine that could explode at any moment, which is why they were called “Jirai Joshi”.⁴ Therefore, the fashion and makeup style worn by these girls is called Jirai Kei. Jirai Kei is regarded to have strong associations with some dark or disturbing themes, and may be related to self-harm, drug use, alcoholism, street parties, illegal sex work, and other rebellious and shocking behaviors.

Ryouasangata Wotaku (量産型ヲタク) specifically referring to female otaku (オタク) who wear similar outfits at events and live concerts. They are known for posting photos of themselves wearing intricately designed Girly Kei (ガリー系) outfits at live events, and many of them tend to look very similar in groups. In 2017-2019, it was observed that fans attending Johnnys (a famous male idol) concerts wore similar outfits.⁵ This phenomenon is called “Ryouasangata Otaku/Wotaku” (量産型オタク/ヲタク). Since then, the meaning of “Ryouasangata” seems to have evolved from a negative term to a term with a more positive connotation, popular among female otaku.⁶ Although Ryouasangata Wotaku's clothing belongs to Girly Kei, it is also related to Jirai Kei. The clothing style of Ryouasangata Wotaku is very similar to that of Jirai Kei, consisting of pink shirts with ruffles, ribbons, lace, and black skirts, which are typical clothing both in Ryouasangata Wotaku's style and Jirai Kei. However, unlike Jirai Kei, Ryouasangata Wotaku removes the dark, sickly, emotionally sad and unstable atmosphere, and replaces it with a cute and fluffy atmosphere of Girly Kei as a whole. So Ryouasangata Wotaku's style is also called Ryouasangata or Jirai Kei Ryouasangata (but in order to avoid confusion with other styles, I will simply refer to as “Ryouasangata Wotaku's style” in this paper). They hope to attract the attention of their favorite male idols by emphasizing their “kawaii” (可愛い).

1 Quoted from Rojita. Retrieved August 04, 2024, from <https://rlab-store.jp/>.

2 “What is a mass-produced girl or mass-produced wota? Explaining the definition! (translated title)” Study Hacker. April 03, 2016. Retrieved July 15, 2024, from <https://study-hacker.net/vocabulary/ryouasangata-joshi>.

3 “Research on the Fashion Awareness of Modern Youth Through a Actual Survey of ‘Ryouasangata Fashion (mass-produced fashion)’” Watanabe Asuka. October 31, 2023. Retrieved July 15, 2024, from <https://cir.nii.ac.jp/crid/1050282676658071296>.

4 “Appearing all over Kabukicho! What is Jirai Kei? (translated title)” Lafary. November 09, 2020. Retrieved July 15, 2024, from <https://www.lafary.net/culture/58348/>.

5 “Voices of sympathy for the ‘History of Janiota's Battle Uniforms,’ which summarizes Johnny's fans' battle uniforms by age group that are ‘nostalgic’ and ‘I wore this.’ (translated title)” Netorabo. December 30, 2019. Retrieved July 15, 2024, from <https://nlab.itmedia.co.jp/nl/articles/1912/30/news017.html>.

6 “Has ‘mass-produced’ become a compliment? (translated title)” Sasayaka na Bibouroku. September 08, 2018. Retrieved July 15, 2024, from <https://applingo.hatenablog.com/entry/2018/09/08/215544>.



Figure 2. The differences between Ryouasangata Wotaku's style and Jirai Kei⁷

As shown in Figure 2, Ryouasangata Wotakus want to make their "oshi" think they're "kawaii" (推しに可愛く思われたい), and mention that they live for their "oshi" (推しのために生きてる). The Jirai Kei has other elements, like crosses, and its unique makeup is important (Figure 3). Jirai Kei usually carry the image of themselves suffering from liking someone too much. And unlike Ryouasangata Wotakus, the wearer of the mine is proud to be seen as "kawaii" (自分を可愛く見せるのが得意), rather than wanting others to think they're "kawaii".



Figure 3. The traits of Jirai Kei makeup⁸

In the past four years, Ryouasangata Wotaku's clothing style has gradually expanded beyond its initial niche, gradually gaining popularity among the public in Tokyo. However, why did Ryouasangata Wotakus choose the Jirai Kei fashion? And why has their fashion style become increasingly popular?

Starting from these questions, through analysis and argument, I have come to my central thesis: the formation and popularity of Ryouasangata Wotaku's style is a compromise

⁷ Quoted from DearMyLove. Retrieved August 17, 2024, from <https://dreamvs.jp/>.

⁸ Quoted from "Jirai Kei Fashion: The Explosive Delicacy Of Japan's Hidden Trend". March 20, 2023. Retrieved August 17, 2024, from <https://sunicadesign.com/jirai-kei-fashion-the-explosive-delicacy-of-japans-hidden-trend/>.

between the ambivalence of compliance and rebellion.

2. Methods

To answer these questions, I conducted field research in Tokyo three times between 2023 and 2024. I observed that many young women in the urban areas of Tokyo, especially in Shibuya (渋谷), Shinjuku (新宿), and Harajuku (原宿), had chosen this style of clothing. Hence, I hypothesized that the popularity of Ryouasangata and the pursuit of kawaii by Ryouasangata Wotaku, in addition to the replacement of the overall atmosphere of Jirai Kei with that of Girly Kei were related to the traditional Japanese society's norms and expectations of women. To delve into how it came together, I used methods such as documentary research and case study to analyze the views and expectations of women in traditional Japanese society reflected in Japanese literary works and historical events. At the same time, the clothing style studied in this paper is highly related to Jirai Kei. Since Jirai Kei is also a subculture fashion in Japan, by using comparative research to analyze the reasons why other subculture styles, such as Ko-Gal (コギャル) style and Lolita (ロリィタ) style, were chosen, we can also understand why Ryouasangata Wotaku chose Jirai Kei clothing [1].

3. Analysis

Through these research methods, I found that the reason why Ryouasangata Wotaku chose this style was related to a compromise they made in their conflicting psychological state. Therefore, I proposed my central thesis: The formation and popularity of Ryouasangata Wotaku's style is a compromise between the ambivalence of compliance and rebellion. I will analyze the causes of the formation and popularity of Ryouasangata Wotaku's style through the desire for social recognition and the resistance to social norms and pressure.

3.1 The Desire for Social Recognition

Ryouasangata Wotaku's desire for social recognition is reflected in the practice of choosing clothing and overall style that adheres to both the "kawaii" standard and the traditional Japanese social expectations for female appearances.

3.1.1 Kawaii and the Fusion of Lolita Fashion

Ryouasangata Wotakus (量産型ヲタク) chose the Jirai Kei-based garment because it incorporates elements of Lolita fashion and meets the "kawaii" (可愛い) standard they are looking for. During my field research in Tokyo, I had conversations with some Ryouasangata Wotaku. They

often mentioned their desire to receive recognition from their “oshi” (推 し), who are usually male idols they admire. At the same time, expressions such as “wanting to look ‘kawaii’” were always mentioned in conjunction with their desire to receive recognition from their idols. It seems that the scenarios of being recognized have transformed into “kawaii” and thus become an important motivation for Ryouasangata Wotaku to choose and modify their Jirai kei fashion. To understand this, we first need to understand what “kawaii” means.

It seems that “kawaii” can be directly translated as “cute”, but although it has the meaning of “cute”, it also has friendly, harmless, and beautiful attributes. In the largest Japanese dictionary, *Nihon Kokugo Daijiten* (日本国語大辞典), “kawaii” is defined as follows [2]:

kawai-i (adjective)

- (1) looks miserable and raises sympathy. pitiable. pathetic. piteous.
- (2) attractive. cannot be neglected. cherished. beloved.
- (3) has a sweet nature. lovely. (a) (of faces and figures of young women and children) adorable. attractive. (b) (like children) innocent. obedient. touching.
- (4) (of things and shapes) attractively small. small and beautiful.
- (5) trivial. pitiful. (used with slight disdain)

As this definition shows, “kawaii” has a variety of contradictory meanings. In Nittono’s research, it was suggested that the possible origin of the word “kawaii” is “kawayui”, which meant pitiable or piteous in the medieval period (approximately 12th to 16th century) and had the meaning of “could not bear to look at”. Later, the word was also used to express pity for socially vulnerable members such as women and children. In the late Edo period, “kawaii/kawayui” began to be used as an adjective to describe cute small things. In ancient times, this meaning was replaced by “utsukushii” (美しい), and in the early modern period, its meaning changed into “beautiful” [2]. Nittono’s survey results also showed that in everyday speech, besides meaning cute, “kawaii” also means helpless, weak, etc [2-4]. At the same time, women are more positive and sensitive to kawaii. “Kawaii” is highly valued by young Japanese people, especially girls, as a behavior standard [2].

The concept of Kindchenschema (or “baby schema”) proposed by Austrian ethologist Konrad Lorenz in his theory of animal behavior in 1943 initially explained the features that make an organism appear cute [5]. Lorenz pointed out that the features of the baby schema would evoke a unique feeling that can best be described in German as “Herzig” (meaning “sweet”, “cute”, “charming” etc.). Lorenz’s explanation of cuteness can be used to understand one of the elements of “kawaii” - the baby schema [2]. Meanwhile,

Nittono supplemented Lorenz’s explanation by showing in his survey that the feeling of kawaii is also related to elements such as “flowers”, “candy”, “accessories”, and “smiles”, rather than being limited to the baby schema [2]. Therefore, we can gain a further understanding of “kawaii” - a cute, friendly, harmless, and beautiful attribute.

Ryouasangata Wotaku chose Jirai Kei clothing because of its connection to the Lolita fashion, which references and integrates elements of Jirai Kei. There is little research on Jirai Kei, especially on the expression of “kawaii” in this type of Jirai Kei clothing. Jirai Kei combines elements of Lolita fashion such as ruffles, bows, lace, pink, and creates a sweet and beautiful appearance. Therefore, I analyzed the style that is related to the origin of this Jirai Kei style, which is Lolita fashion, to understand the connection between Jirai Kei and “kawaii”.

Lolita fashion is mainly influenced by Rococo, Romanticism, and Victorian-era clothing, taking inspiration from the clothes and childrenswear of historical dolls, as well as the descriptions of young girls in 19th-century novels [6]. Lolita fashion is inspired by elegance, cuteness, and non-sexual ideals, combining ruffles, lace, English embroidery, ribbons, bows, and sugary embroidery to create a doll-like image. This fashion style is defined in its classical form as modest, childlike, cute, pretty, and aristocratic, often referred to as princess-like. These elements align with the semantic meaning of “kawaii” in Japanese everyday language. And the Jirai Kei clothing that combines Lolita fashion elements undoubtedly also aligns with the “kawaii” pursued by Ryouasangata Wotaku, which is why Ryouasangata Wotaku chose Jirai Kei clothing.

3.1.2 Submission to the Expectations of Japanese Society for Female Images

In addition to Ryouasangata Wotaku wanting to appear cute to gain the attention of her favorite male idol, I believe that their choice of Jirai Kei clothing and the integration of Girly Kei atmosphere is also related to the historical expectations of women in the society they live in. They accepted the expectations of society, especially the male members of society, including the male idols they admire, to gain their attention. Therefore, I analyzed the expectations of women in Japanese society through the descriptions of women in past Japanese literary works and the social roles and images of women in different eras of Japan. Japanese literary works have depicted diverse female characters through delicate descriptions and rich plot, providing valuable materials for studying the image and status of women in traditional society. *The Tale of Genji* (源氏物語), for example, provides a detailed description of court women and their lives in the Heian period (平安時代). *The Tale of Genji* was written by Murasaki

Shikibu (紫式部), a female writer of the Heian period, and it depicts the aristocratic culture, etiquette, love, and human nature in Japan's Heian period aristocratic society. Therefore, *the Tale of Genji* not only reflects the social life and values of Heian-period Japan, but also serves as an important cultural text for understanding the expectations of traditional Japanese society towards women.

Lady Murasaki (紫の上) is one of the important female characters in *the Tale of Genji*. The descriptions of women like Murasaki in *the Tale of Genji* always revolve around their beauty, elegance, gentleness, and loyalty. The Heian Period was a culturally flourishing period in Japanese history, and the aristocracy's pursuit of beauty was particularly prominent. Aristocratic women often displayed their beauty through makeup and intricate clothing. In *the Tale of Genji*, beauty is an important aspect of female value. Genji's love for Murasaki was largely due to her beauty. Purin is depicted as having "the beauty of spring flowers" [7], which emphasizes the importance of beauty in the Heian Period, when great importance was placed on the external beauty of women. At the same time, *the Tale of Genji* also reflects the Heian Period's emphasis on the cultivation of women's elegant demeanor. The women in *the Tale of Genji* usually have refined manners and speech and display the bearing of aristocratic women. In *the Tale of Genji*, Murasaki is not only beautiful but also has graceful manners and behavior [8]. Such descriptions reflect the social expectation of women's inner charm and consider gentleness to be an important component of female charm. Additionally, the female characters in *the Tale of Genji* are generally portrayed as having gentle and submissive personalities. In response to the Heian society's male-dominated structure, Murasaki exhibits a submissive and dependent on Genji, always accepting Genji's arrangements [8]. This docile trait reflects the social expectations placed on women in the Heian era, in which women would display gentleness, submissiveness, and compliance with the arrangements of the family and society. Loyalty and endurance are also frequently depicted in *The Tale of Genji*. In the description, even though Genji repeatedly moved on to other women, Murasaki still accepted it silently, showing her endurance and loyalty to Genji [8]. The portrayal of female loyalty and endurance in *The Tale of Genji* also reflects the Heian era's demand for female loyalty, requiring women to remain loyal and enduring in the face of emotional and domestic issues.

In different eras, the expectations of Japanese society towards women have changed, but they are mostly similar to the beautiful, elegant, gentle, and loyal image portrayed in *The Tale of Genji*. The *Makura no souchi* (枕草子) of the Heian Period also mentioned that the beauty of women was an indispensable part of court life, and Sei Shounagon

(清少納言) described the dress and makeup of women in detail, showing the importance of female beauty in society at that time. The etiquette culture of the Edo Period (江戸時代) had strict requirements for the elegance of women. Women from the aristocratic and samurai classes were required to receive etiquette education from an early age, when they started learning how to behave appropriately and elegantly in various situations, such as tea ceremony (茶道) social activities. The Tokugawa Period (徳川幕府) placed more emphasis on the gentleness of women. At that time, Japanese society emphasized family harmony, hoping that women would play the role of gentle and caring wives and mothers, taking care of the family, supporting their husbands, and educating their children. The idea of "good wife and wise mother" (良妻賢母) gradually formed. Meanwhile, this idea was discussed in the works of Confucian scholars such as Nakae Touju (中江藤樹), Yamaga Sokou (山鹿素行) and Kaibara Ekiken (貝原益軒) in the earlier Edo Period, and the specific discussions are described [9]. The idea of "good wife and wise mother" became an important female concept in Japanese society, especially prominent in the 1920s and 1930s [10].

Based on the descriptions of female characters in "*The Tale of Genji*" and the expectations of women in different eras of Japanese society, we can derive an ideal female image in Japanese society - beautiful, elegant, gentle, and loyal. This seems to align with the expectations that Ryou-sangata Wotakus have for themselves. In addition to their loyalty to their idols, beauty, elegance, and gentleness are a perfect description of the Jirai Kei clothing they have transformed themselves into. In the source of the origin of the word "kawaii," we learned that the semantic change of "kawaii" has absorbed some of the meaning of "utsukushii" (beautiful). Although the meaning of "kawaii" tends to describe cute things, they can replace each other to some extent in modern Japanese social discourse. The Jirai Kei chosen by Ryou-sangata Wotaku, which contains a lot of Lolita elements, not only creates a Kawaii feeling, but also reflects the elegant aristocratic image of this fashion style in its classical form [11]. Moreover, the expectation of women's gentle image in the past was more about the expectation of being a "good wife and mother," while the current "gentle" no longer limits itself to being a "good wife and mother," but describes a general atmosphere of mildness, friendliness, and positivity. This is why Ryou-sangata Wotaku used the Girly Kei atmosphere on the basis of Jirai Kei clothing. The overall atmosphere of Girly Kei is gentler, whether it's accessories, makeup, or colors. This is reflected in accessories dominated by pink or gold, pearls, and more ruddy makeup, as well as clothing colors primarily in pink, white, blue, and black with lower satu-

ration. The original atmosphere of Jirai Kei, on the other hand, was dark, sad, and emotionally unstable, which did not fit the gentle feeling. Therefore, the original makeup, accessories, and colors of Jirai Kei were replaced with the atmosphere of Girly Kei, making the overall style gentler and thus achieving the overall image that Ryouasangata Wotaku pursues.

In other words, the overall image created by Ryouasangata Wotaku not only comes from the pursuit of “kawaii,” but also from their interpretation of the expectations of Japanese society for female images. Through fashion styles that meet both of these aesthetic standards, Ryouasangata Wotaku’s desire to be recognized by their male idols, or more broadly, their desire to be socially recognized, is fulfilled. Since other women in Tokyo also want to be socially recognized by meeting the “kawaii” standards and the expectations of society for women, Ryouasangata Wotaku’s style has become growingly popular in Tokyo.

However, Girly Kei and Uniqlo’s popular minimalist and elegant fashion styles also align with the mainstream aesthetic that originates from Japan’s social expectations of female images, but they were not chosen by Ryouasangata Wotaku. Even the Jirai Kei style that was chosen by them is a rebellious style. Even just the clothes, short skirts and thick shoe soles and fancy decorations challenge the traditional image of a modest and gentle woman. Even the Lolita fashion, which is related to it, was found to be in rebellion against social and family traditional values in the research [6]. This seems to be contrary to the conformity to the social expectations of female images in Japan that was discussed earlier. This precisely reveals the conflicting psychology of Ryouasangata Wotaku in choosing this type of clothing and completes the true motives behind their choice of this type of clothing.

3.2 The Resistance to Social Norms and Pressures

Another reason why the style of Ryouasangata Wotaku became popular in Tokyo was the escape from social pressure and the rebellion against traditional social norms by women in the post-pandemic era.

3.2.1 Escape from Social Pressure

The formation and popularity of Ryouasangata Wotaku’s style are due to people’s escape from social pressure. It has some commonalities with other subculture fashion, such as lolita fashion. In Bernal and Adele’s study, Lolita culture was rooted in the 1990s [6], when Japan was facing one of its worst periods of economic instability, social unrest, and cultural decline - the bubble economy era [6]. They believed that Lolita culture expressed similar anxiety in a manner close to British punk, representing a

generation’s reaction to society and fear of the future. As a result, many were reluctant to enter the uncertain adult world and sought to escape reality, subconsciously hoping to remain in or return to a safe childhood [6]. The features associated with Lolita clothing that are linked to infant schema create a sweet, childish, and innocent image of young female, giving young women who wear it a sense of avoiding adulthood and “growing up” and returning to childhood [6, 11]. In fact, whether it is the Jirai Kei subculture that integrates Lolita elements, or the earlier Kogal style subcultures, although they appear at different times and have different expressions, they are all like Lolita fashion in that they convey their desire for prolonging childhood and postponing adult responsibilities through exaggerated clothing styles in visual terms [12]. To satisfy such desires, these subculture fashion styles and the Ryouasangata Wotaku’s style that adopts Jirai Kei clothing are chosen by their wearers.

In times of turmoil, this desire became more widespread and prominent, driving these subculture styles into the mainstream. For example, Jirai Kei became popular from the COVID-19 pandemic era, with the rising economic and family pressure caused by the pneumonia epidemic becoming a problem that working-class people had to face. These problems were more severe among urban women, who not only had to face economic downturns and work pressure but also had to face the social expectation that they should form and manage their families [13]. However, the shirts and skirts with bows and ruffles provided a sense of prolonging childhood and escaping adult responsibilities, making them widely popular among Tokyo women. Not long after that, the Ryouasangata Wotaku’s style, which used Jirai Kei clothing, also gradually gained popularity. Although this style had already formed before the COVID-19 pandemic, it was not entirely the same as Jirai Kei, so the popularity of Ryouasangata Wotaku’s style cannot be considered an extension of Jirai Kei’s popularity. However, the reasons for the subsequent popularity of both clothing styles are highly similar, being related to prolonging childhood and escaping adult responsibilities. That is to say, the formation and popularity of Ryouasangata Wotaku’s style are also due to people’s escape from social pressure.

3.2.2 Against traditional social ideas

Ryouasangata Wotaku’s style also rebelled against social conventions as much as other subcultural fashions such as Jirai Kei and Kogal style. They share the short skirt and the sun-tanned skin, signature elements of the Kogal style, which are usually associated with childishness, cuteness, or kawaii, but in this case, they express sensuality. In addition, Jirai Kei will use exaggerated eyeliner and eye

shadow to create a sickly makeup with puffy, tearful eyes and a pale, sickly face, creating an atmosphere of disaffection and sickly sweetness. The exaggerated, complex pleats and decorations also rebel against the mainstream aesthetic demand for simplicity and modesty in clothing. That is, these subculture styles, in addition to avoiding the responsibilities that come with growing up (such as getting married and having children, dealing with financial problems), have a common theme of expressing rebellion and individuality. They no longer follow the traditional Japanese aesthetic image of women, nor do they imitate the mainstream fashion that is uniform, but instead, they express their individuality in such exaggerated styles (such as disaffection and the fusion of Western styles) [14].

Ryousangata Wotaku's style also features intricate decorations, like Jirai Kei, expressing rebellion against traditional social norms. Therefore, combining "The desire for social recognition" and "The resistance to social norms and pressures," Ryousangata Wotaku's style represents a middle ground between the mainstream aesthetic and a subculture style of rebellion. They are not full-fledged "heretics" who are in revolt against the mainstream aesthetic; rather, they hope to gain recognition from society - or specifically, from their male idols. However, Ryousangata Wotaku does not belong to the mainstream culture either. They want to show their uniqueness, yet also desire to conform to society's expectations of female image in order to gain recognition. In the midst of conformity and rebellion, they opted for a compromise solution. They blend Girly Kei and Jirai Kei to create their own fashion style. In the post-pandemic era, the world economy is once again facing recession, and Japanese society is inevitably entering turmoil [15]. People living in this environment feel uneasy, especially young urban women, who need to face more uncertainty compared to other regions. Whether it is economic downturn, employment problems, or the pressure from society's expectations of marriage and childbirth, these pressures are more evident on them [13]. Therefore, they yearn to escape the "growing up" and the accompanying real responsibilities and return to the safe childhood. They longed to stand out and express their individuality, yet they also wanted to feel secure by conforming to the mainstream aesthetic. As a result, many young women in Tokyo opted for the fashion style of Ryousangata Wotaku, leading to its popularity in Tokyo.

3.3 Lolita Complex

Meanwhile, whether it's Lady Murasaki, Lolita fashion, or Enjo-kosai, which would be associated with Kogal style [16] and Jirai Kei and even Ryousangata Wotaku's style, all seem to evoke the Lolita complex [6, 17]. However,

the Lolita complex has nothing to do with the popularity of these subculture styles actually. Lolita complex refers to an adult male's sexual attraction to young girls or girls with youthful characteristics [17]. The love that Genji had for Murasaki is an example of the Lolita complex. Enjo-kosai refers to the prostitution of junior and senior high school girls and middle-aged men, which is one of the actual manifestations of the Lolita complex in Japan [17]. It seems that Lolita fashion, which is related to the Lolita complex in terms of inspiration, and Kogal style, Jirai Kei, and even Ryousangata Wotaku's style, which are related to Enjo-kosai, all conform to the Lolita complex of Japanese society's men. However, in fact, despite the similar monikers and shared time frame, Lolita Fashion is essentially the opposite of the Lolita complex. Most of the Lolita fashion wearers are not aware that the subculture they adhere to is named after a controversial 20th-century American novel. Women who wear Lolita fashion do not do so for the male gaze [17]. The same situation also applies to Kogal style, Jirai Kei, and Ryousangata Wotaku's style. Indeed, some wearers of subculture styles engage in prostitution with middle-aged men. But this is actually because these clothing styles have elements of young girls, sweetness, and sexiness, which are in line with Japanese men's sexual fantasies [6, 17]. Meanwhile, John Whittier Treat argues that in Japan's commercialization of young girls and fetishization of objects, young girls symbolize passive, disposable objects in a game due to their unique social role.⁹ Subculture fashion representatives are often considered rebellious, which deepens their passive, fragile role. Therefore, the reason why these subculture fashions are associated with Enjo-kosai is because they meet the needs of the Japanese male Lolita complex. Enjo-kosai participants also therefore choose these subculture styles. However, for most subculture fashion wearers, they choose these fashion styles without associating them with the Lolita complex and Enjo-kosai. They are more likely to express their desire to prolong childhood and show their individuality through these subculture fashions.

In contrast, Ryousangata Wotaku's style blends the atmosphere of Girly Kei, softening their expression of rebellion in clothing. This also makes this style less associated with negative behaviors such as street parties, drinking, and illegal sexual activities, which are often considered related to subculture fashion. At the same time, as the internet gained popularity - particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic when real-life social interactions were restricted

⁹ Shibusawa Tatsuhiko, quoted by: Iizawa Kotaro: *Shashin, shōjo, korekushon*; on pp. 40-41 of: Honda Masuko et al (eds.): *Shōjo ron*; Tokyo: Aoyumi Sha, 1991; quoted in: Treat, 1993; p. 363

- more individuals began to realize that many subculture styles had no direct connection to negative behaviors. They found fulfillment in these fashion styles, which expressed their desire for social acceptance and served as a form of rebellion against societal norms and pressures. Consequently, Ryousangata Wotaku's style eventually became popular.

4. Limitation and Prospect

Despite clarifying the relationship between Lolita Complex and subculture fashion, there are still many issues worth studying between them. Additionally, my research primarily focused on qualitative studies such as comparative studies, and the fieldwork was relatively short, so there was a lack of a large sample for quantitative analysis to further confirm my viewpoint. The differences in understanding of "kawaii" among different groups of people, the differences in understanding of Ryousangata Wotaku's style and other subculture fashion styles worn by individuals, etc., all require further investigation and quantitative analysis. The use of psychological scales should also be considered in future investigations.

The role of the COVID-19 pandemic period and the internet in the popularity of Ryousangata Wotaku's style are two points worth paying attention to in future research. During the COVID-19 pandemic period, people's lifestyles underwent significant changes, while subculture became more popular and widespread. Such phenomena are not only seen in Jirai Kei and Ryousangata Wotaku's style, but also in the Cosplay and Anime cultural communities. The popularity of these subcultures is not limited to Japan but has spread globally. The unique aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic period compared to other turbulent times in the past are worth our attention and further in-depth analysis.

Meanwhile, the fragmentation of information on the Internet has led to distraction [18]. This seems to restore the way the participants of subculture fashion perceive when they first come into contact with subculture fashion—they only intuitively feel the clothes and shapes, and do not associate them with negative behaviors such as Enjo-kosai. In addition, people have become more afraid of loneliness in the use of the Internet [18]. This may also have something to do with the reason why women choose Ryousangata Wotaku's style that wants to conform to the mainstream aesthetic while also wanting to show their individuality and rebellion.

5. Conclusion

Based on the above analysis, we can draw the conclu-

sion that the formation and popularity of Ryousangata Wotaku's style is a compromise between conforming to mainstream aesthetics and resisting societal norms and pressures. To gain social recognition, Ryousangata Wotaku and young women in Tokyo chose the fashion that was "kawaii" and met the expectations of women in Japan society. However, they also rebel against the social pressures and stereotypes that come with growing up, and desire to express their individuality. This ambivalence led them to choose and improve the Jirai Kei clothing. This mentality is even more pronounced in the post-pandemic era. Ryousangata Wotaku's style has become popular in Tokyo as urban women face greater uncertainty and social pressures, as well as the pandemic-induced shift to the internet.

Since there has been the limited prior research in this area, my study offers valuable insights and direction for future investigations into Ryousangata Wotaku and their associated fashion styles. The findings also provide a new perspective on the formation and popularization of fashion trends. Additionally, my research challenges the negative stereotypes people have about subculture fashion and clarifies the relationship between subculture fashion and Enjo-kosai.

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