



JSAA 2013 Abstract Template

**Beautiful Ballerinas, Doll Cuties and Toy Soldiers: Shôjo Manga, Lolita and the *Kawaii* Fashion Aesthetic.**

**Panel Abstract**

This multidisciplinary panel brings together three papers on shôjo manga and Lolita fashion in Japan and Australia. Rather than look at the often studied themes of sex, refusal to grow-up or Loli-con, this panel will examine practitioners of Lolita fashion in terms of the occidental wonderlands that they create. Each paper examines different ways in which elements of idealised European culture have been adopted, appropriated, and recreated in the context of Japanese shôjo manga and street fashions. This process is further complicated with the growing popularity of these popular cultural products in countries outside of Japan.

Disciplinary area: Costume Studies, Sociology, Manga Studies

**Proposed Program Stream:**

**A Gauze Dress and Ribboned Shoes: a cultural investigation of shôjo manga and ballet culture in contemporary Japan.**

**Masafumi Monden**

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**Paper 1 Abstract**

The popularity of classical ballet as a cultural form grows apace in a global context. Even in a country such as Japan, which has not been previously identified as a ‘ballet capital’, is receiving

wide public attentions. However, few scholars outside of the fields of dance and health studies have examined the role of ballet as a powerful cultural format. For an understanding of conventionally female-dominated arenas, ballet and the ideas that circulate around it reveal the complex inter-relationship between femininity, beauty, and self-hood. A prime example is the understudied genre of ballet manga in Japanese girls' comic book (shōjo manga) culture, and its influences on Lolita fashion.

The history of ballet comic books (manga) can be said to mirror that of girls' comic book culture (shōjo manga). With the first examples published in the mid-1950s, ballet manga continues to be very popular in Japan, with more than 350 titles published from 1954 to 2008. Emerged in Italy, developed in France and polished in Russia, Ballet was introduced to Japan circa 1911, initially as part of the curriculum for training theatre actors. The ballet boom swept over the country in the late 1940s followed by the first ever performance of a full-length ballet in Japan (Swan Lake) in 1946. While this new cultural interest in ballet and its representations ranged across literature through television programs to cinema, it is in girls' culture, namely shōjo manga, where ballet made its indelible mark. Furthermore, shōjo manga present a window onto the numerous changes in contemporary Japanese women's conception of self-identity. Despite this significance, the role of ballet manga in contemporary Japan is currently underexplored, probably as the result of manga being considered not a form of high art and ballet's status being subsumed by the culture of art, architecture, film etc.

The history of ballet manga reveals that particularly in the years immediately following World War II, classical ballet was an epitome of a future dream world, connoting luxury, beauty and glamour. The genre of ballet manga in Japan used this particular art form, particularly its costumes and romanticized settings of old world Europe, as a mix of femininity, rigour and elegance re-made for Japanese audiences. This paper argues that Lolita fashion might further exemplify the popularity of romantic, ribboned and flattering aesthetics of ballet costumes in Japanese culture, thus negotiating the paradox of reality and fantasy in lived experience. Is Ballet, therefore, not experienced simply on the stage but in Japan is often interpreted through shōjo manga and fashion?

# **Doll make: A visual analysis of cosmetics and the transformation of the face in kawaii subcultures.**

**Meg Russell**

University of New South Wales

## **Paper 2 Abstract**

This paper intends to explore the influence of *shōjo manga* and the image of the doll on the use of cosmetics and beauty regimes in *kawaii* fashion subcultures, in particular *gosurori* (lit. ‘gothic lolita’) and *gyaru* (lit. ‘girl’ or ‘gal,’ often translated as ‘barbie girl’). While both styles have opposing conceptual intentions (*gosurori* seeking modesty, whilst the *gyaru* pursue sex appeal) both are inspired both the stylistic features of *shōjo manga* and the painted appearance of dolls when constructing the *kawaii* fashion appearance. By transforming the self, *kawaii* subcultural participants are able to construct and retreat into their own occidental wonderland. Focusing on *kawaii* fashion magazine spreads, mooks, advertising and cosmetic packaging, this paper will use visual analysis to explore the semiotic meanings behind this construction of *kawaii* face and the complexities surrounding its intended meaning. This paper is primarily informed by the subcultural theories established by the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies, and the work of Hebdige (1979, 2004, 2008, 2012) and his emphasis on style as a form of meaning making in subcultures.

Intended for young girls, *shōjo manga* is usually based upon occidental fantasies of 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe featuring its flora, costuming, language and setting in its artwork. Characters are heavily stylised with large doll-like eyes and luscious blonde hair. *Shōjo manga* and this fascination with the exoticised West have influenced the creative development of dolls in Japan, in particular Licca-Chan and VOLKS ball jointed dolls. These dolls encapsulate the *shōjo manga* state in which characters are on the cusp of becoming, their face and body sculpted as part adult and child. *Kawaii* subculturalists extend this dream of an occidental wonderland into young adulthood through their fashion and artistic practices.

The key aspects *kawaii* fashion face is the emphasis on large eyes which are achieved through multiple sets of eyelashes, double sided tape or cosmetic surgery and circle lenses, along with

voluminous hair that is not considered naturally Japanese (primarily attained by wearing wigs). The use of facial expression and gesture is used to emphasise these *kawaii* attributes. These cosmetic enhancements reflect the process in which the porcelain doll and Asian ball jointed doll face is customised, and the hyperbolised hair and face is also reminiscent of the appearance of *shōjo manga* heroines.

This transformation raises two key points of consideration regarding the conceptual goals of *gyaru* and *gosurori kawaii* subculturalists. The first is whether the *shōjo manga* face constructed through cosmetics is meant to signify the beautiful appearance of a girl who is Japanese, Western or a completely new imagined ethnicity. The second is whether this dramatic transformation seeks to express a *kawaii* personality that is gentle and passive like a doll, or a playful refusal to enter into an adult state filled with social responsibility. By transforming the face, *kawaii* subculturalists are able to construct and perform within their own occidental wonderland in which ethnicity, fiction and reality are blurred.

## **Little Lords, Spangled Soldiers and Princely Paraphernalia – The Romantic Military Uniform in Shōjo Manga and Japanese/Japan-inspired Street Fashions.**

**Emerald L King**

University of Tasmania

### **Paper 3 Abstract**

Arguably one of the most iconic figures in *shōjo manga* is the military decorated heroine of *Berusaiyu no bara* (Rose of Versailles, Ikeda Riyoko, 1972-1973) Oscar Françoise de Jarjayes. Unlike her beribboned sisters in flowing gowns and be-ruffled dresses, Oscar strides across the pages of her story in decorated martial splendour. Set in pre-revolutionary France, *Berusaiyu no bara* is not the only *shōjo manga* to utilise on military protagonists (both male and female) garbed in splendid and decorative uniforms inspired by European armies of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Key manga include Yoshinaga Fumi's *Jeraru to Jyaku* (Gerard et Jacques, 2000) and Osamu Tezuka's *Ribon no kishi* (Princess Knight, 1953-1968). Indeed the practice of setting manga in idealised European (or European-ish) locals is a generic trope that was firmly established in the

so-called ‘golden age’ of shōjo manga in the 1970s and continues to be deployed in present day manga.

This paper will examine the use of period European inspired costumes and military uniforms in shōjo manga and the overlap with Japanese street fashions of the late 1990s and 2000s. A subset of Lolita fashion, *Ōji* (lit. prince) or dandy style (also known as ‘kodona,’ an English language portmanteau of the Japanese words *kodomo*, child, and *otona*, adult), combines elements of Victorian era boys’ fashion such as frock coats and knickerbockers. This style of street fashion, which originated in Japan with brand labels such as ‘Alice and the Pirates’ and has become widespread amongst Lolita fashionistas in Australia and the rest of the world, draws upon the shōjo manga introduced above as well as from sources such as Toboso Yana’s *Kuroshitsuji* (Black Butler, 2006 onwards). While there are other key inspirations for this style such as ‘visual *kei*’ (lit. style) rock bands which are reminiscent of western hair metal or glam rock bands, we will see that there is something of a symbiotic relationship between *Ōji* style and shōjo manga.

What does it mean for, predominately, young women to wear dandy or boyish clothing? Is it simply a case of fans of Lolita fashion who are uncomfortable with the myriad ribbons and doll-like look of the style opting for clothing that better suits their taste? Or is there a deeper meaning here? How does the wearing of these outfits change when military accoutrements such as medals, sashes and epaulets are added to an ensemble? This last question is further complicated if we consider the addition of such martial elements in light of the military uniforms adopted by leaders such as Chiang Kai-Shek or Emperor Hirohito during the Pacific World War. Are followers of dandy fashion dressing as toy soldiers or, to use Fujimoto Yukari’s elegant phrasing, are they simply looking for an *ii-basho*, a ‘place to belong?’