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To call something Japanese evokes particular imagery. The aesthetics of the samurai and the kimono and the other trappings of traditional Japanese life are well-known and easily identifiable. There is a separate but equally identifiable modern aesthetic of specific, almost tribal forms of dress and identification. Clothing has been a determinant of the tribe, subset, culture, and group denomination throughout human civilization. From the Neolithic hunters wearing the furs of the most dangerous beasts to show that they hunt well to modern status fashion with its labels and leaving tags on things so everyone knows how much it cost, this is a universal thing to do. The Japanese are no exception to this. Films possess introspection into the clothing options of a generation or class of individuals. Many films depict two distinct female personalities that clash initially but eventually find some common ground and coexist in Japan's vast cultural tapestry. The film *Kamikaze Girls* (Nakashima, 2004), has set a standard for fashion, friendship, and subculture representation movies.

A prime example of regulated fashion was the sumptuary laws of the Edo period where certain forms of outward displays of wealth were banned for members of lower social classes (Shively, 1964, p 124). This led to the iki school of aesthetics characterized by subtle displays of wealth that only those in the know could recognize. Iki is "a synthesis of three attributes only seemingly at odds with one another: bitai (erotic allure), ikuji (fearless pride), the legacy of bushido ethos; and akirame (resignation), the corollary of a Buddhist worldview" (Pincus, 1991, p147). We see here the nation acting as parent and those within society subverting its rules and finding ways to flaunt them in the name of fashion. That iki is subdued and Zen does not mean that it is all that different from the riotous, standout fashion of later youth. Even those who must seem to conform o0r risk losing their livelihoods will try to stand out and rebel.

The forcible opening of the Japanese economy and the reforms of the Meiji period led to the abolition of the social class system and its sumptuary laws restricting clothing and displays of wealth (Ravina, 2017). Further, synthetic dyes and later fabrics made it easier to keep the appearance of formerly rare elements. The opening economy led to a push towards Western clothing, first among the officers of the army and navy and the upper levels of the public sectors. Wool became a sort of luxury fabric as it was difficult to produce domestically in Japan and had to be imported. The value of textile imports to Japan ebbs and flows but is overall upward. It has increased from USD 3 billion in 1987 to USD 12 billion in 2022 (Trading Economics, n.d.). Kimono remained a favored item of fashion, however, and often Western clothes were only worn in public and by men who would change into more traditional clothes once they returned home from work.

So the adoption of western clothing, begrudging at first – true, but still there and mostly done when outside the house as a show of status or acceding to expectations. Couple this with the aesthetic choice to use clothes as an indicator of belonging and it creates the perfect environment to use clothes to declare your membership in a tribe. During the late Edo period when iki was in fashion, everyone who didn't belong to the noble or warrior classes wore simple kimono but if you were a wealthy merchant, yours would be lined with silk. If you encountered another wealthy merchant, they would see the lining and you would both know. But it would be

nice if outsiders could see as well. Thus the stage is set for the adoption of more outlandish styles and clothes to indicate tribal or group membership and philosophy. Rather than having to explain your attitudes, you can just dress a certain way and expect others to know where you stand (Sood, 2022). And there's still room for subdivision and subtle cues that only those who know will see.

"Idleness, casual sexuality and aimless violence;" (Shamoon, 2002, p01) are the three pillars of every disaffected youth subculture ever. The peacocking, odd dress, mannerisms, and outward displays of belonging and tribal identifiers are sort of secondary to these things. They serve as ways of knowing one's own. We can imagine the bored teenager equivalents of Neolithic tribes wearing their deerskin loincloths tied a certain way to differentiate them from their elders and those peers that don't belong. Ignoring their chores and running off to rumble with the group from the other side of the mountain that tie their loincloths some other, unacceptable way. The elders clutching their "pearls" and despairing of the youth of the day…

The adult response to these subcultures is as much a part of the dance as the behavior of the youths: worry, public wailing, and rejection of everything they are doing. It's always the same but the fact is, most members of these groups are dabblers who will adopt the mannerisms and outward signals of belonging, they're not in it for the long haul. They'll ultimately become the salarymen and productive workers of the next generation of society and they too will bemoan the state of their children and wonder if they're lost and irredeemable.

Kamikaze Girls has been hugely proclaimed to be the cult movie for two particular styles in Japanese subcultures based on fashion. The movie follows the protagonist, a 17-year-old girl who is obsessed with the Rococo style of 18th-century France, however, feels stuck in 21st-century Shimotsuma. A charming, profound friendship with a girl whose style is inspired by biker gangs known as Yanki with Yakuza or gangster aesthetics mixed in. Western fashion pervades this movie. Almost everyone belonging to any sort of identifiable group wears some sort of identifiable uniform, from the gangsters' "tracksuit style" to Momoko's "Lolita" with its frilly dresses and even the civilians with their clothes from Jesco that are still very western. There is nary a kimono or yukata to be found in this movie. The girls in particular use their styles to stand out from the crowd, cope with their traumas, and put a wall between them and "polite" society. This stand-out style also provides them with character elements that they believe are a part of their subcultures. Momoko believes "Rococo sees fragility as a feminine virtue. Tough girls who can defend themselves disgust me" (Nakashima, 2004). Ichigo speaks in a put-on, low, almost masculine tone to seem tough. With the contrasting styles come contrasting ideologies. Momoko rejects labor as unsuitable for her while Ichigo says "don't be ridiculous, it's a dog-eat-dog world" (Nakashima, 2004) and wants to be a mechanic. The film's MacGuffin is a legendary embroiderer and the store that sells the "Lolita" style clothes is a major setting with the characters returning to it many times even though it takes hours on the train to get there.



Figure 1- Clothing Contrasts



Figure 2- On the Street

'Nana' (Otani, 2005) is another unlikely friendship / different worlds sort of film though it's mostly solely about the Rock and Roll culture of Japan and trying to make it and what happens to people around you. The film's protagonists are two women named Nana who meet while both are moving to Tokyo. One of them, Nana O, is a punk trying to break into the Rock and Roll scene while the other, Nana K, is a "normal" girl trying to make a new life with her boyfriend. This movie very much believes that you can be friends with someone from a different

“subculture” and that the attitudes, dress, and mannerisms are superficial and that one’s quintessential Japanese identity is what matters in the end.

‘Helter Skelter’, (Ninagawa, 2012), though it is often lumped in with Kamikaze Girls as a Japanese fashion, subculture movie, is a very different sort of film. It could easily have been set somewhere other than Japan as it is more of a commentary on the way fashion media and expectations warp someone’s sense of self and self-esteem. Always trying to be most beautiful, to be on top, and gatekeeping against any promising up-and-comers. In a way, the fabulously beautiful models are a subculture to themselves, as the detective says, “pretty on the outside but like a fruit bugs have eaten from within” (Ninagawa, 2012).

There is room to analyze whether the friendship between subcultures is a common, natural occurrence or a cinematic plot device. Or, is the outward group belonging represented by fashion and attitude merely a veneer on the underlying Japanese’ness that is all the same.

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