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## Molten Hot: Japanese Gal Subcultures and Fashions

Theresa M. Winge

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natural cycle of destruction and regeneration.

By doing so Vincent sheds any associations with Ivan the Fool and for the first time takes control of his destiny. In the final scene, standing amid the devastation as sunlight breaks through oppressive black clouds, Vincent (now an amalgamation of his two previous identities) states: “[here] the real battle begins, for I am Ergo Proxy, the emissary of death.” As life returns to Earth, inevitably so must death. Like the consumption of the forbidden fruit, Vincent’s (re)awakening ensures that mortality again enters the world. Here, the destruction of paradise isn’t so much the end of humanity as its rebirth: “Evening came, and morning came; it was the first day” (Gen. 1:5).

A testament to *Ergo Proxy*’s scope and ambition, many intertextual references remain unremarked upon. Some are purely superficial, amounting to little more than acknowledgment of works admired by the creative staff. Others, however, like those discussed above, add significant depth and meaning to both character and setting. *Ergo Proxy* represents the kind of intelligent and informed storytelling that can be achieved within genre confines and, more generally, by serialized anime as a whole. The possibilities the series projects onto a seemingly familiar canvas offers welcome respite from genre pieces that willingly repackage and resell all-too-familiar stories and ideas.

## Notes

1. Bruce Bethke, “The Etymology of Cyberpunk,” 2000; [http://www.brucebethke.com/nf\\_cp.html](http://www.brucebethke.com/nf_cp.html) (accessed February 20, 2007).

2. Lawrence Person, “Notes toward a Post-cyberpunk Manifesto,” <http://slashdot.org/features/99/10/08/2123255.shtml> (accessed February 20, 2007).

3. Arthur Ransome, ed., *Old Peter’s Russian Tales: The Fool of the World and the Flying Ship*; <http://www.surlalunefairytales.com/russian/oldpetersrussiantales/fooloftheworld.html> (accessed May 16, 2007).

4. Leo Tolstoy, “Ivan the Fool,” in *Ivan the Fool*, “A Lost Opportunity,” and “Polikushka”: *Three Short Stories of Count Leo Tolstoy*, 9–80 (1885; repr., Amsterdam: Fredonia, 2001).

## Molten Hot: Japanese Gal Subcultures and Fashions

THERESA M. WINGE

Patrick Macias, Izumi Evers, and Kazumi Nonaka (illustrator). *Japanese Schoolgirl Inferno: Tokyo Teen Fashion Subculture Handbook*. San Francisco, Calif.: Chronicle Books, 2004. ISBN 978-0-8118-5690-4.

Patrick Macias and Izumi Evers have packed a clever combination of historical overview, ethnographic study, subculture field guide, and fashion magazine into *Japanese Schoolgirl Inferno*. This book takes a chronological look at the chaotic and fashionable lifeworlds of teenage “gal” subcultures in Japan from the late 1960s to the present. While some of the gal subcultures highlighted in this book no longer exist, most have been immortalized in manga, anime, live-action television series, and movies. For example, the authors indicate the characters in the film *Kamikaze Girls*<sup>1</sup> were members of gal subcultures—the Lolita subculture and the Yanki subculture (which descended from the Lady’s subculture).

The Introduction sets the context for the Tokyo teenage gal-fashion subcultural scene by sharing a narrative about a visit to a Japanese nightclub. Macias and Evers suggest that many Japanese fashion trends can be traced back to single teenage girls or groups of girls. In the Introduction, the authors describe meeting and interacting with some gal-subculture members who are savvy young women and not merely fashion statements. This point is further established throughout the book’s interviews with individual subculture members. The Introduction concludes with a foldout gal-relationship chart, which presents the chronological progression

and interrelated natures of the Japanese teenage gal-fashion subcultures. This chart illustrates the direct and indirect connections between Bad Gals, Sexy Gals, and Artsy Gals, from the late 1960s to present, with highly stylized illustrations of representative subculture members.

The body of *Japanese Schoolgirl Inferno* is organized chronologically, providing historic overviews of Japanese female subcultures divided into decades from the late 1960s to the present. Each female subculture highlighted includes a description of the subculture, quotes, photographs of actual members, illustrations, profiles with a diagrammed illustration of fashion details, must-have items, and the ideal boyfriend. In addition, there is supplemental information, such as how to recreate the Manba makeup, the day in the life of an Ogal and a Gotholi, and interviews with individual subculture members.

The “Bad Gals” section discusses the Sukeban, Takenokozoku, and Lady’s gal subcultures. It concludes by discussing Japanese schoolgirl uniforms. These subcultures are first seen in Japan during the late 1960s and some groups continue through present day. The bad gal subcultures seem to be a response to male subcultures and activities center around motorcycles (or scooters).

Macias and Evers credit the Sukeban (female boss) with being the first Japanese all-girl gang, in the late 1960s. The preferred fashions for the Sukeban is the schoolgirl uniform, especially the Sailor Fuku style, with accessories including white school shoes, razors, and chains. The Sukeban were the female counterparts to their “ideal boyfriend” the Yakuza, violent male gangs.

The Takenokozoku (bamboo sprout tribe) were street dancers who gathered in large numbers. The authors credit the Takenokozoku with reinventing and bringing youth back to the Harajuku neighborhood in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The preferred fashion for the Takenokozoku was brightly colored, baggy clothing inspired by traditional kimonos, with garish ribbons, necklaces, hats, bows, and whistles

as accessories. The ideal boyfriend for the Takenokozoku was a good dancer who shared her fashion sense.

The Ladies were all-girl biker gangs from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s who most likely descended from the Sukeban. The preferred fashions for the Ladies were Tokku Fuku robes with *kanji* embroidery and net sandals, along with motorcycle helmets, cigarettes, and scooters or motorcycles as accessories. The Ladies were the female counterparts to the Bosozoku (speed tribe), male motorcycle gangs.

The “Bad Gals” section concludes with a discussion of schoolgirl uniforms. Macias and Evers trace the history of the Japanese schoolgirl uniform and its connections to the Gal subcultures highlighted in *Japanese Schoolgirl Inferno*. Most notably, the Kogal subculture popularized schoolgirl uniforms by exaggerating aspects of it. Japanese schools also encouraged the popularity of school uniforms by contracting designer brands, such as Benetton, Hiromichi Nakano, and ELLE, to design and update school uniforms.

The “Sexy Gals” section includes the following gal subcultures: Kogal, Gonguro, Manba, Kigurumin, and Gal, along with a “How-to Manba Make-up” and a “Day in the Life: Ogal” supplemental information. These subcultures were first seen in Japan during the mid-1990s and some groups continue today. The sexy gal subcultures commonly adopted Western styles, such as tan skin, designer brands, and blonde hair, in exaggerated ways.

According to the authors, Kogals emerged in the mid-1990s and disappeared in the late 1990s. The Kogal took its name from the words *kodomo* (child) and *gal* (for a fashionable young woman). The Kogal subculture may be the most identifiable and controversial of the gal subcultures discussed in *Japanese Schoolgirl Inferno* because of their overtly sexualized schoolgirl uniforms and (rumors of) dating older men for money. Kogal fashion consisted of shortened plaid skirts; oversized, loose socks (requiring

sock glue to stay up); very tan skin; brown contact lenses; and designer clothing. The ideal boyfriend for a Kogal was a wealthy adult male, although she most likely thinks of him as an accessory. The Go-Go Yubari character in Quentin Tarantino's film *Kill Bill Vol. 1* (2003) is a Kogal.

Gonguro (blackface) was originally known as Ganguro, and the media named these women *Yamanba* (mountain witch hag). This gal subculture surfaced in the late 1990s and disappeared by the early 2000s. Their preferred fashion was extremely dark tan skin, white accented eyes and lips, bleached hair, gold jewelry, platform shoes, and short dresses. The controversy around the Gonguro was that they were rumored to be "dirty girls," lacking good hygiene habits. There is not an ideal boyfriend for the Gonguro, because this look was more repellent than attractive.

Manba surfaced as the descendants of Gonguro in the early 2000s and still exists today. As a result, many Gonguro characteristics, such as the hygiene controversy, similar make-up, and colored contact lenses, extended to the Manba. The Manba fashion includes Alba Rosa clothing (floral motifs), colored hair extensions, and facial decals. The ideal boyfriend for the Manba is a Center guy, who shares her fashion sense.

According to Macias and Evers, the Kigurumin (ethnic mascot) subculture existed only from 2002 through 2003 (but note the continuation of the animal-human fashion within the Decora subculture). The Kigurumin's preferred fashion was animal costumes and Manba make-up. There is not an ideal boyfriend for the Kigurumin because no one wants to date an animal-human character.

Gal refers to a young woman drawn to the Gal circles in certain areas of Tokyo, but in this section, Macias and Evers primarily discuss the Gals who have returned to these areas and formed a new, older Gal subculture, such as the Onee Gal (older sister). The preferred fashion for the Gal is curled hair, perfect make-up, expensive and sparkling jewelry, and high heels.

The ideal boyfriend for a Gal is a wealthy, attractive young man.

The "Arty Gals" section describes Nagomu Gal, Gothloli, and Decora subcultures, and includes a "Day in the Life: Gothloli" supplement. These subcultures were first seen in Japan during the 1980s and some groups continue to the present.

The Nagomu Gal subculture was thought to reign in the streets of Tokyo during the 1980s. This subculture gathered around a common interest in Japanese subcultural music, and their name was based on an indie record label—Nagomu. The Nagomu Gal's preferred fashion was sunglasses, long-sleeved tee shirts, and rubber-soled shoes. The Nagomu Gal's ideal boyfriend was an indie band member.

According to Macias and Evers, the Gothloli subculture began in the late 1990s and continues now. However, other sources suggest this subculture has roots as early as the mid-1980s (e.g., the formation of brands such as Milk in 1989 and Metamorphose in 1993 establish the commercial success of the subculture's fashions as early as the late 1980s). The preferred fashions for the Gothloli is the black lacy dress, frilly knee-high socks, head dress, and goth-style accessories, with pale face makeup and dark eyeliner and lipstick. The ideal boyfriend for a Gothloli is a member of a Visual Kei band. *Rozen Maiden*, for example, is an anime, manga, and video game that have Gothloli characters.

The Decora is an eclectic subculture seen in Tokyo during the mid-1990s through the present day, and primarily don costumes from the pages of *Fruits* and *Fresh Fruits*.<sup>2</sup> The Decora are considered to be ultracute and prefer fashions of brightly colored clothing, cute character goods, and novelty accessories. The ideal boyfriend is a boy who hangs out in Harajuku and appreciates the eclectic Decora style.

The book concludes with "What Kind of Gal are You?" and a yes–no flowchart that allows the reader to determine if she (or he) is a Bad Gal, Sexy Gal, or Arty Gal. By answering questions

such as “Do you like cute things?” and “Are you partial to gorgeous things?” a reader moves along a path specific to her or his fashion preferences to an end at a gal subculture destination.

Patrick Macias and Izumi Evers have presented an informative, humorous, and timely take on the global pop culture phenomenon of Japanese gal subcultures and fashions in this book. Kazumi Nonaka’s illustrations complement the text and photographs to create a beneficial field guide to gal subcultures and emerging fashions in Tokyo. This book will be appreciated by a wide and varied audience for its novel and easily accessible presentation of Japanese gal subcultures and related fashions.

### Notes

1. *Kamikaze Girls*, dir. Nakashima Tetsuya (Viz Video, 2006).

2. Aoki Shoichi, *Fruits* (New York: Phaidon Press, 2001), and *Fresh Fruits* (New York: Phaidon Press, 2005).

## Monstrous Toys of Capitalism

BRENT ALLISON

Anne Allison. *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006. ISBN 0520245652

Anne Allison’s latest book examines Japan’s powerful toy manufacturing industry, a rapidly growing influence on the global toy market. Allison (no relation to the reviewer) introduces her book with its main point—she attributes the global success of Japanese toys to the sense of mastery that they offer children. While this point is not new, children’s ability to disassemble and recombine disparate parts of these toys speak to children who crave “commodity animism” (86) as a result and corrective of life governed by fluctuating postmodern capital. This monstrous political economy of endless consumption results in similarly monstrous

arrangements of living and subjectivities that are shifting, porous, and fragmented (30). This review will offer a brief summary of the book and interrogate issues that Allison discusses.

Japan found its industry and militarist ideology vanquished by the destruction from World War II. Ironically it was from the waste tin left by the occupying American victors that ingenious Japanese restarted an export market of toys, like model U.S. Army jeeps, to circulate back to American children (39). A new nationalist ideology bolstered by hard work and optimism for industrial and consumer technologies manifested itself in two major postwar cultural products. The monstrous reptilian Gojira and the childlike robot Tetsuwan Atomu served as different models of Japan(ese) rebuilt with technology, respectively imbued with anxiety and promise (40–65). Gojira, becoming Godzilla in the United States, had, due to failures of cultural translation and appreciation, also modeled perceived Japanese filmmaking cheesiness for Americans for decades (47).

Japan’s impressive economic recovery was equaled by its thirst for high-tech consumer products and the rise of a fragmented subjectivity wherein the only commonality was the shared reality of an atomized lifestyle (70). This is in large part Allison’s explanation for the social dysfunctions of general stress, *hikikomori* (or reclusive “shut-ins”), and incidents of violence well publicized in a country that perceives itself as lacking in crime. To Allison, this monstrous state of living is one side of the same capitalist coin with the monsters that pervade the Japanese toy market. It is not that toys cause these problems, Allison suggests, but that both are birthed from the same political economy.

This condition prompts Allison to treat the *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* less forgivingly than the other artifacts of Japanese popular culture she discusses. For her, *Power Rangers* is “the embodiment of post-Fordism and a postmodern aesthetics in the realm of children’s mass culture” (97) without being much else.