

Chapter 2

Cuteness in Japan

2.1 Cuteness and *Kawaii*

2.1.1 “*Kawaii*” as a Translation of “*Cute*”

In this chapter, the Japanese word “*kawaii*” will be discussed instead of “cute” because the Japanese do not use the English word “cuteness” or “cute” in their conversation or in written form and “*kawaii*” is the closest word to “cute.” English–Japanese dictionary (Takebayashi and Azuma 2003) defines the word “cute” as (1) *kawaii* (cute, pretty), *kireina* (beautiful), (2) *Rikouna* (intelligent), *nukemeno-nai* (shrewd, smart), *hashikoi* (shrewd, clever), *kiga-kiku* (clever). This definition corresponds to entries in typical English dictionaries now available in the U.S. and the U.K.

2.1.2 The Word “*Cute*”

According to *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Dictionary* (5th ed.) (Nichols et al. 2011), “Cute was originally a shortened form of acute in the sense ‘keenly perceptive or discerning, shrewd.’ In this sense, cute is first recorded in a dictionary published in 1731. Probably cute came to be used as a term of approbation for things demonstrating acuteness or ingenious design, and so it went on to develop its own sense of ‘pretty feeling’”.

In *A Dictionary of the English Language* (Johnson 1755) by Samuel Johnson, there is no “cute” but just acute with the meaning “(1) Sharp, ending in a point, opposed to obtuse or blunt, (2) In a figurative sense applied to men, ingenious, penetrating, opposed to dull or stupid, (3) Spoken of the senses, vigorous, powerful in operation, (4) Acute disease, (5) Acute accent.”

In summary, the English word “cute” means something that draws people’s attention sharply in an attractive and emotional way.

2.1.3 “Kawaii” Without the Meaning of Acuteness

In contrast, the Japanese word “*kawaii*” does *not* have the meaning of acuteness at all. Compared to the notion of acuteness, “*kawaii*” means simply to be attractive and soft. It is not related to intelligence at all. Instead, the word is more similar to the term “pretty.”

In English dictionaries, “cute” and “pretty” are defined as follows:

Cute

- Attractive or pretty in a youthful or dainty way (American Heritage 5th ed. 2011).
- Having a pleasing and usually youthful appearance (Merriam Webster’s 2017).
- Pleasingly pretty or dainty (Random House 1967).
- Delightfully pretty or dainty (American Heritage Student’s Dictionary 1986).
- Acute, clever, sharp, shrewd (1731), U.S. cunning (1868) (Shorter OED 1959).
- Charmingly pretty, sweet. (N.A.M.) clever, shrewd (Paperback OED 7th ed. 2012).
- Attractive. Smart in a way that can seem rude (Longman 2004).
- (none) (Johnson 1755).

Pretty

- Pleasing or attractive in a graceful or delicate way (American Heritage 5th ed. 2011).
- Attractive to look at usually in a simple or delicate way (Merriam Webster’s 2017).
- Pleasing or attractive to the eye in a feminine or childlike way (Random House 1967).
- Pleasing or appealing in a delicate way (AH Student’s Dictionary 1986).
- Beautiful in a slight, dainty, or diminutive way of women or children (1440) (Shorter OED 1959).
- Having an attractive or pleasant appearance (Paperback OED 7th ed. 2012).
- A woman or child who is pretty is attractive. Attractive or pleasant to look at or listen to (Longman 2004).
- Neat, elegant, pleasing without surprise or elevation (Johnson 1755).

As shown above, even in English, the meaning of acute (sharp, shrewd, and clever) seems almost to have been lost today, and cute is similar to pretty. If this is true, *kawaii* can also be used as the translation of cute as well as pretty.

kawaii is now included in OED (Oxford...2010) as follows:

- (a) Adjective. Cute, esp. in a manner considered characteristic of Japanese popular culture; charming, darling; ostentatiously adorable.
- (b) Noun. That which is *kawaii*; cuteness.

But to co-author Kurosu, primary author of this chapter, who is a Japanese, it is not clear how English-speaking people today differentiate the use of “cute” and “pretty,” and it is still unclear which of the terms “cute” and “pretty” will match better to the meaning of “*kawaii*.”

By the way, Vincent, a design consultant who has been living in Japan for 20 years, wrote that the closest word to “*kawaii*” is “interesting” in English (Vincent 2014).

2.1.4 “*Kawaii*” and its Derivatives

“*Kawaii*” is an adjective and is written as “可愛い” in Japanese, which is a combination of the stem “可愛” and the suffix “い” to make the word to be an adjective.

The stem “可愛” consists of “可” and “愛” where the former is a prefix to mean “-able,” “-ible,” “possible,” and “can” and the latter is a word meaning love and affection.

Following is a list of derivatives of “可愛.”

“可愛い” (*Kawaii*) adj. pretty, sweet, cute, tiny, dear, darling

“可愛がる” (*Kawai-garu*) v.t. to love, to make a pet of, to be affectionate to a person.

“可愛げ” (*Kawai-ge*) n. the charm of an innocent child

“可愛さ” (*Kawai-sa*) n. the cuteness or the manner of being “可愛い”

“可愛らしい” (*Kawai-rashii*) adj. the appearance of being “可愛い”

“可愛らしさ” (*Kawai-rashisa*) n. noun form of “可愛らしい.”

2.2 Historical Overview of *Kawaii* in Japan

2.2.1 Heian Era (794–1185)

This section describes the historical background of the *Kawaii* concept in Japan.

It is common to go back to Sei-shonagon as the first author who wrote about the concept of “*Kawaii*.” Sei-shonagon was a writer and poet around 1000 AD/CE. Her most important work is an essay *Makura-(no)-Soushi* (枕草子). The famous part “pretty things (section 155)” is included in this chapter. It is partly translated by Waley (Shonagon 2011) as follows:

The face of a child that has its teeth dug into a melon. A baby sparrow hopping towards one when one calls “chu, chu” to it; or being fed by its parents with worms or what not, when one has captured it and tied a thread to its foot. A child of three or so, that scurrying along suddenly catches sight of some small object lying on the ground, and clasping the thing in its pretty little fingers, brings it to show to some grown-up person. A little girl got up in cloister-fashion (bobbed hair) tossing back her head to get the hair away from her eyes because she wants to look at something.

In order to enable you to understand the visual image described in this text better, please consider Fig. 2.1. This image is a *manga* that Junko Shibata drew (Shibata 2016). The translation by Waley corresponds up to fifth frame of the



Fig. 2.1 Manga description of pretty things by Sei-Shonagon (Manga by Shibata J.; used with permission)

manga. Although the text in the *manga* is written in Japanese, you easily will be able to make a guess about what is being described.

The original title of this part is *Utukushiki-mono*, literally meaning “beautiful things,” although Waley translated it as pretty things. The word *utukushi* at that time did not mean beautiful but the loving feeling of the viewer towards the infant or feeble person or small things. While “*utukushi*” meant pretty, as was explained, the origin of “*kawaii*” was “*kaho-hayushi*” at that time. “*Kaho*” means the face and “*hayushi*” means being embarrassed or ashamed.

In *Konjaku-Monogatari* (今昔物語) (Anonymous 1185, c. 12th century), which was edited in the twelfth century, there is a description in vol. 25, part 6 “この児に刀を突き立て、矢を射立て殺さむは、なほかはゆし” meaning “Killing this boy by piercing with the sword and shooting the arrow is ‘*kahayushi*’ after all.” This use of “*kahayushi*” has a meaning of being embarrassed or ashamed. This is also evidence that in Heian era “*Kahayushi*” does not have the meaning of cute nor pretty. The meaning was quite different from the word “*kawaii*” today.

“*Kaho-hayushi*” then became “*kahayushi*,” then “*kawayui*” and “*kawaii*.” As the notation of the word changes to “*kawaii*,” its meaning also changed from an embarrassed feeling to a loving feeling and “*utukushi*” changed from a loving feeling to beautiful. “*Kawaisou*” came to have the meaning of an embarrassed feeling or pity. These transitions are summarized in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Word transition in Japanese regarding cute or pretty, beautiful and embarrassed feeling or pity

English	Historical Change			Japanese Today	
Embarrassed feeling, pity	Kawo-hayushi	→ Kahayushi		Kawaisou	可哀そう
Cute, pretty	Utukushi		→ Kawayui	→ Kawaii	可愛い
Beautiful			→ Utukushi	→ Utukushii	美しい

2.2.2 After Heian Era and Edo Era (1603–1868)

During the Heian era, when Sei-shonagon wrote her essay, Japan was governed by the aristocracy and was rather peaceful. After the Heian era, those eras including Kamakura (1185–1333), Muromachi (1336–1573) and Azuchi Momoyama (1573–1603) followed, when the *samurai* fought each other and controlled each small land area. We don't have clear evidence how the concept of “*kawaii*” was treated at that time. In 1603, Ieyasu Tokugawa dominated all of Japan, and the Edo era started. Although he was a *samurai*, the popular culture grew much in this era.

Endo (2014) wrote that one example of “*kawaii*” during that time is the *Maneki-neko* or “a stylized image of a cat, with one paw raised in invitation, that serves as a shopkeeper's charm for prosperity (Fig. 2.2)” (Collick et al. 2002). Endo hypothesized that *Maneki-neko* was transformed from the fox statues as the messenger of divinities that were placed at the gates of shrines (Fig. 2.3), of which a typical example can be found at Fushimi Inari shrine in Kyoto and Anamori Inari shrine in Tokyo. Though the body of fox is lean, the body and the paw of cat are round and fat and look more “*kawaii*.” At that time, cats were popular as a pet among tradesmen and artisans.

Fig. 2.2 *Maneki-neko* (Photo by Masaaki Kurosu, and used with permission)



Fig. 2.3 Fox statue at Anamori-inari shrine in Tokyo (Photo by Masaaki Kurosu, and used with permission)



2.2.3 Meiji Era (1868–1912) and Taisho Era (1912–1926)

After the Edo era, the Meiji era followed, which was a time of great changes in Japan, triggered by the arrival of Commodore Matthew Perry in 1853. At that time, Japan opened her gates to foreign countries, imported knowledge and technology from European countries, established the constitution and other social systems, waged war against the Qing dynasty in China, Russia, *etc.* Perhaps Japanese people did not have the time or calmness to enjoy the *kawaii* concept.

The next era was the *Taisho* era that began in 1912. Though the *Taisho* era lasted only 15 years, many cultural movements collectively called “*Taisho Roman*” occurred during that period.

Endo points that the “*Taisho Roman*” is influenced by the Japonism in European countries that originally was influenced by Japanese culture in the Edo era. It is a re-importation of the Japanese culture. Endo showed that the kewpie doll was designed in 1909 by Rose O’Neill, who was an American illustrator influenced by the Orientalism and the Japonism at that period. Kewpie is used as a mascot symbol for mayonnaise by a Japanese company and is still popular in Japan. According to her, such modern origin of *kawaii* examples like the kewpie doll is a result of cultural mixture and is not just a pure-Japanese culture.

Another important movement occurred in 1914. Takarazuka Revue Company was organized and held a revue. Takarazuka is an organization where only young women play the role of men and women in a musical show. Fans of Takarazuka ranged from teenagers to seniors, most of which were women. It is a critical point that women-culture had a focal point that leads to *kawaii* culture. *Kawaii* has a deep-rooted preference among women until today.

2.2.4 Showa Era (1926–1989)

Regarding the *kawaii* concept, we cannot forget Nobuko Yoshiya (1896–1973) and the *Ribbon* magazine. Yoshiya was a Japanese novelist whose novels were loved by very many young women. Her novels dealt with friendship and love among women. Similar to Takarazuka, young women, especially before their marriage, paid attention to the way of life of other young women. This tendency served as the basis of *kawaii* culture today.

Ribbon is a *manga* magazine for young girls up to around 12–13 years old and started its publication in 1955. It is a separately bound magazine supplement that attracted young girls interested in *kawaii* things. The peak of its publication occurred from the late 1970s to the mid-1990s. The publication's contents included *manga* that described active love affairs among young girls and was called the “Bible of Young Girls.”

Jun-ichi Nakahara (1913–1983) was a painter and a fashion designer. He drew beautiful young women with big eyes and designed modern dresses. His drawings influenced the fashion of young women at that time and still have a high reputation.

Yan (2010) analyzed these trends among young women and girls as a suspended period before marriage, which was the goal of a woman until the end of World War 2. After World War 2, girls' culture took a different form in such movements as a surrogating experience through the *manga* *The Roses of Versailles* by Riyoko Ikeda (1947–). Japanese girls projected their self-images into French aristocrats and expanded their dream world. On the other hand, there also were a stream of *Otome-tic manga* that were written, for example, by A-ko Mutsu (1954–). “*Otome-tic*” *manga* were not describing a dream world but rather the real world around young women, in which they have to commit themselves.

After *Ribbon*, there appeared many fashion magazines for teenagers and young women such as *An-an* that started in 1970 and *Non-no* that started in 1971. Recent trends of *kawaii* in relation to fashions, magazines, and other cultural factors will be discussed in Sect. 2.4.

2.3 The Popularity of *Kawaii*

2.3.1 *Kawaii is Now Flooding Japan*

One day, at a boutique in Tokyo, co-author Masaaki heard the following conversation:

Mother: This coat is *kawaii* and will fit you well, won't it?

Daughter: Oh how *kawaii* it is! But this one is also *kawaii*, isn't it?

Mother: Hmm, indeed both are *kawaii*. But I can buy you just one of them. I think either will do, 'cause you're a *kawaii* girl.

Daughter: I know, I know, I'm *kawaii* and will look nice with either one.

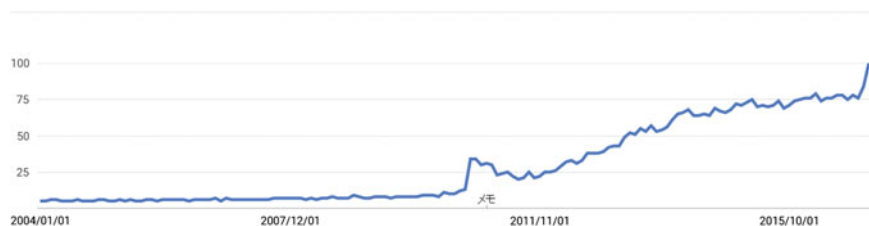


Fig. 2.4 Popularity of *kawaii* in Japan (Google Trends 2017.01.05)

The mother was around her mid-40s and the daughter seems to be around 18. In this case, the word “*kawaii*” is used frequently to describe both the object (coat) and the person (daughter). It was amazing that the word “*kawaii*” is repeated so many times as if the two people did not know other adjectives. They didn’t mention the color, material, or design, but only the total impression of the coat by using the word “*kawaii*.” They did not talk about the face, style, sense of fashion, nor personality of the daughter, but only about the total impression of the daughter by a single word “*kawaii*.”

Today, *kawaii* is generic and is frequently used in many situations by many people especially among (young) women for describing beauty, attractiveness, and appeal as well as cuteness and prettiness. Its connotation is vast and seems to be quite situation-dependent, which will be discussed in Sect. 2.4.

How the word “*kawaii*” has been used in Japan is shown in Fig. 2.4. Google Trends show that the trend curve rising monotonically since 2010.

2.3.2 *Kawaii is also Trending in the World*

The Japan Expo started in France in 1999 based on the interest of *manga* and *animé* among French youth. The event attracts many European youth, especially young girls. The total attendance at the first Japan Expo that was held near Paris was 3200 in the site of 2500 m². However, in 2016, the total attendance grew to 250,000 at the 17th Expo. The size of the site was enlarged to 125,000 m². This event is now focusing on aspects of Japanese culture and pop culture and “*kawaii*” is one of the central concepts.

In 2007 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan created the International *Manga* Award, which attracted 245 entries from 38 countries. The ministry started the *Animé* Ambassador project in 2008. In 2009, as the Trend Communicators of Japanese Pop Culture, whose alias is *Kawaii* Ambassadors, three young female fashion models [Misako Aoki (1982–), Yuu Kimura (1986–), and Shizuka Fujioka (1989–)] were nominated to carry out publicity activities. In 2010, the METI (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry) started the office of Cool Japan.

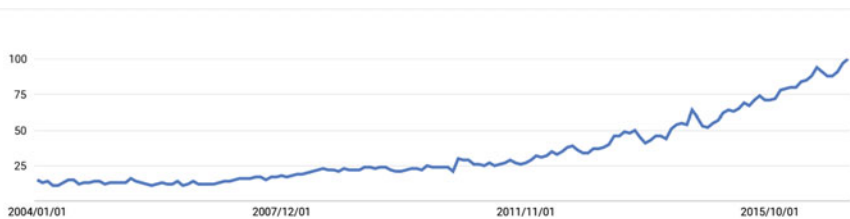


Fig. 2.5 Popularity of *kawaii* culture in the world (Google Trends 2017.01.05)

In addition to these official activities, the popularity of Hello Kitty and other cute characters such as *Tare-Panda*, *Monchhichi*, Astro-boy (*Tetsuwan Atom*), *Pikachu*, et al., attracted the hearts of foreign people. However, note that this development does not mean that foreign cute figures are not popular, even loved, in Japan. Japanese people also love Mickey Mouse, Miffy (*Nijntje*), Garfield, Sponge Bob, and other foreign-born characters. In any case, as shown in Fig. 2.5, the popularity of *kawaii* is a somewhat exponentially increasing in the world. According to Sakurai (2009), some foreign girls even want to become Japanese. This is the first time that Japanese culture is enthusiastically attracting attention among ordinary people in foreign countries.

Today, it is common to find *kawaii*-related shops in foreign countries. For example, there is a shop *Kawae import* (www.kawaeimport.se) in Uppsala, Sweden, where small decorated objects, stuffed dolls, and other Japanese items are sold as well as Lolita fashion goods. In other word, *kawaii* is now a synonym of Japanese culture.

However, this tendency should not be interpreted simply that the *kawaii* culture that originated in Japan has conquered the world. It could be said that some mental mechanism similar to the sympathy among foreign people was triggered by the Japanese *kawaii* culture. It would seem appropriate to say that the *kawaii* culture of Japan has become global because everyone in the world has something in common that resonates with a similar emotional mechanism. Abe (2015) wrote “*Kawaii* and child-likeness is now spreading throughout the world as a value that transcends the generation, social position, and region.”

2.4 Three Types of *Kawaii*

In this section, we present a classification model of *kawaii*. The three models of *kawaii* proposed include: (1) Psycho-physical *kawaii*, (2) Cultural *kawaii*, and (3) Generic *kawaii*. In this classification, the current trend described in Sect. 3.2 will be described in terms of the cultural *kawaii* model.

Nittono (2016) proposed a two-layer model of *kawaii*. He wrote “*Kawaii* has two aspects: one is an aspect of feeling and another is an aspect of cultural value.” What he categorized as *kawaii* as feeling is similar to our category of the

psycho-physical *kawaii*, and what he categorized as cultural value is almost the same as our category of cultural *kawaii*. But there is another *kawaii* concept that should be called the generic *kawaii*, of which one can find an example in the conversation in Sect. 3.1 between the mother and daughter.

2.4.1 *Psycho-physical Kawaii*

Physical characteristics of objects, such as the shape, size, length, color, and texture, will affect the *kansei* of observers. Sometimes, *kansei* is simply described as the mixture of perception and emotion. However, one should not forget about the projection mechanism of the human observer. *Kawaii* is expressed as a property of an object and can be found in the expression “That baby animal is cute” or “This girl is pretty.” On the other hand, emotion is what occurs *inside* the human being. Thus, such an expression as “I feel happy to see that baby animal” or “I love this girl” is possible, but one doesn’t say “I feel *kawaii* to see that baby animal” or “I feel *kawaii* towards this girl.” *Kawaii* is an impression “projected” onto the object based on the feeling of a person as if it is a property of the object itself. In other words, *kawaii* is not a feeling but is a *kansei* impression.

Psycho-physics is a discipline that studies the relationship between the physical characteristics of a stimulus and the resultant psychological impressions, sensations, or perceptions. An early approach in this direction in relation to cuteness is the ethological concept of baby schema (*Kindchenschema*) proposed by Lorenz (1943). This schema is a set of physical features including the big head compared to the whole body size, the round and protruding face, high forehead, big eyes, and small nose and mouth. These features are thought to be biologically provided so that they cause an affective response, and the baby consequently can receive much caretaking by adults. The same visual features can be found in *Makura-no-Soushi* (Fig. 2.1). The baby schema has a strong influence in academia even today [e.g., Glocker (2009)].

With regard to the psycho-physical *kawaii* attributes, Ohkura (2016) conducted a series of psychological experiments in terms of shape, color, and texture instead of an organic stimulus, such as a baby’s face. She first examined if there are *kawaii* shapes and *kawaii* colors, using colored figures including the square, circle, heart shape, star shape, etc., in various colors. What she found was that round shapes are judged to be *kawaii* more than sharp shapes. She also found that pink, orange, yellow, and green are judged to be *kawaii* more than other colors, especially cold colors. Furthermore, she found that colors with high luminosity and high saturation are preferred to be *kawaii*. Regarding texture, she found that soft and fluffy materials are *kawaii*. These materials, also, have concordant onomatopoeia expressions, such as *fusa-fusa*, *mof-mof*, *fuka-fuka*, *mosa-mosa*, and *pof-pof*. On the contrary, materials with such associated onomatopoeia expressions, such as “*zak-zak*,” “*jogi-jogi*,” “*jusa-jusa*,” “*jori-jori*,” “*goro-goro*,” and “*zag-zag*” are not *kawaii*. The size of objects was also found to relate with *kawaii*: smaller objects are

judged to be *kawaii* more than larger objects. However, she found, also, that very tiny objects are not necessarily judged to be *kawaii*. There seemed to be an optimum range of size in relation to *kawaii*.

Regarding the size of objects, O-Young (1982), a Korean researcher of comparative culture, who does not explicitly discuss the issue of *kawaii*, but has pointed out the core characteristics of Japanese culture, wrote that there is a special prefix *mame* meaning “beans” in the Japanese language. The prefix “*mame*” is used when something is very tiny (and *kawaii*) in the situation such as “*mame-hon*” (tiny book), “*mame-jidousha*” (tiny automobile, including both real and toy vehicles), “*mame-ningyo*” (tiny doll), and “*mame-denkyu*” (tiny light bulb). This tendency is still viable, so as to produce the strap ornament for cell phones. In the case of a lunch pack, Japanese culture invented *orizume-bento* (a lunch packed in a small box). A famous rock garden at Ryoan-ji in Kyoto is also a miniature of the whole universe. Bonsai is a small-sized tree by which people can enjoy nature in a small flower pot. All of these examples, O-Young insists, are representing the tendency of Japanese people towards miniaturization, or shrinkage.

Today, Sylvanian Families doll house manufactured by Epoch Co., Ltd., is also a *kawaii* example of shrinkage. *Puri-kura*, or a photo-sticker booth that first appeared in 1995 in Japan, is similar to the photo booth that can be found in many countries to take passport pictures. However, because of the small size of the pictures, with many decorations, it is now an example of pop culture in Japan. Hence, it could be said that there are many typical examples of small items in Japan that trigger the *kawaii* impression.

As a summary of this subsection, the baby schema by Lorenz is an instinctive tendency that is prevalent among mammals. Ohkura found that such psycho-physical dimensions as color, shape, and texture as well as size are related to *kawaii*. Furthermore, O-Young proposed that small size is one of the major cultural features of Japan. Regarding the cultural *kawaii*, this topic will be discussed more in detail in Sect. 4.2.

Although this topic is not a fashion trend, this psycho-physical *kawaii* can be accepted by almost all people, including both male and female, from young to old, as shown in Fig. 2.6. Note that the ordinate is the rough estimated population and is not showing the exact number because the statistical data regarding such characteristics has not yet been released.

2.4.2 Cultural Kawaii

Regarding the cultural *kawaii* in Japan, there are at least two types of young women and girls including Lolita and Gal.

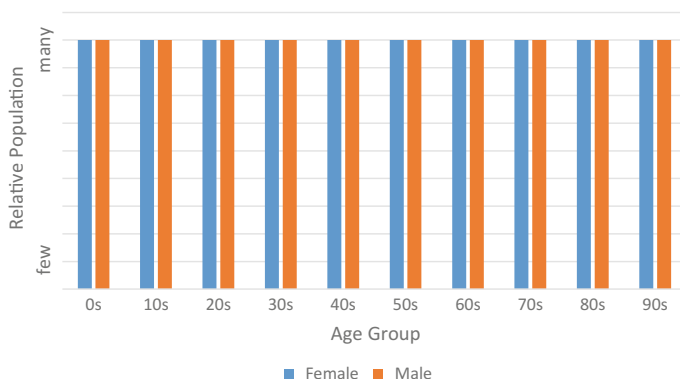


Fig. 2.6 Psycho-physical *kawaii* can be accepted by almost all the people

2.4.2.1 Lolita

First, the relationship between Lolita and *Loli* should be explained. *Loli* is a typical Japanese short form constructed for Lolita, which is related to the novel by Nabokov (1955). In the novel, the leading character Humbert has a pedophilic desire for and is strongly attracted by 12-year-old Lolita (Dolores Haze). Based on the novel, the term Lolita complex was generated in Japan. Lewis Carroll, who had a collection of photographs of Alice Liddell and other young girls, is said to be an example of someone who had a Lolita complex. It is called *Loli-con* in short, and the word “*Loli*” has become to have a meaning of attractive young girl. In the novel, Lolita was a sexual attraction, and the *Loli-con* tendency is still found today in *manga*, especially those sold at *Comiket* (comic market).

However, the Japanese Lolita fashion movement is different from *Loli-con* and is *not* targeting men. Only the connotation of the attractiveness of a young girl is common between Lolita fashion and *Loli-con*. Lolita fashion is the movement among young girls for themselves and has almost no sexual connotation. Young girls in Lolita fashion do not care for the eyes of men. In this sense, Lolita fashion has something in common with *Takarazuka*, the novel of Nobuko Yoshiya and paintings by Jun-ichi Nakahara.

Lolita fashion is typically described in the novel *Shimotsuma Monogatari* by Takemoto (2002). In this novel, the heroine Momoko Ryugasaki is a high-school student who lives in a rural town near Tokyo. She wears Lolita fashion for her own satisfaction. Her fashion style is quite different from that of her classmates and neighbors, but she does not mind it at all. She is going her own way by herself. This strong self-contained tendency is the main characteristic of Momoko. She is strong and independent, although dependent on her father financially. In other words, Lolita fashion is not limited to the costume, makeup, nail art, and hair style; it is the entire mental orientation aiming at self-satisfaction.

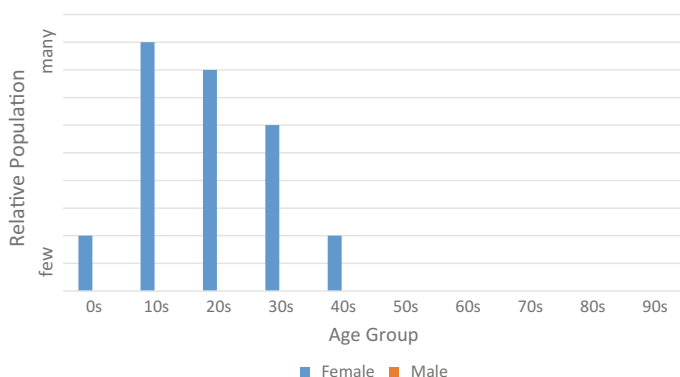


Fig. 2.7 The Lolita fashion is a trend for girls and young women

The characteristics of Lolita fashion include dressing in baroque, rococo, or Victorian style, complete with ribbon, lace, and frills. Inside the skirt, Lolita girls wear the *pannier*, or hoop petticoat, in order to make the clothing bulge outward. Preferred colors are white, pink, and other off-white colors. They carry a *pochette*, or small handbag, and such small decoration items as a flower, fruit, animal, sweets, heart, coronet, *etc.*

Lolita fashion is the *kawaii* movement among girls and young women. See Fig. 2.7, in which the ordinate is a rough estimate, and the total population of those who wear Lolita fashion is not yet clear. However, the figure shows that the Lolita fashion trend is only among females.

An example of Lolita fashion can be seen in Fig. 2.8. These girls typically can be found in the Harajuku area of Tokyo.

Historically, Lolita fashion started in the 1970s when the boutique MILK opened in Harajuku. After that, many boutiques opened such as “BABY, THE STARS SHINE BRIGHT, Angelic Pretty, and Jane Marple. Then, many different concepts were created such as *Ama-Loli* (Sweet Lolita) and Classical Lolita (Fig. 2.9).

In 1990s, goth-*Loli* or gothic and Lolita, was born under the influence of the fashion of Vivienne Westwood and of “visual rock bands,” such as X Japan and Buck-Tick. The Goth-*Loli* fashion features lace, ribbon, and frills in black or white. Preferred colors include black, white, pink, purple, and blue (Fig. 2.10). Goth-*Loli* is sometimes also called “visual,” which comes from the visual rock band style.

2.4.2.2 Gal or Garu

Gal means a young girl or woman with unique makeup and fashion whose central area is Shibuya in Tokyo, which is located 1.6 km from Harajuku. Typically, these young girls or women dye their hair gold or brown, put on white loose socks (loose is pronounced “looze” in this case) with short skirt, and put on striking makeup (Fig. 2.11).



Fig. 2.8 Example of Lolita fashion (*Illustration* Thitiporn Yaisensen and used with permission)

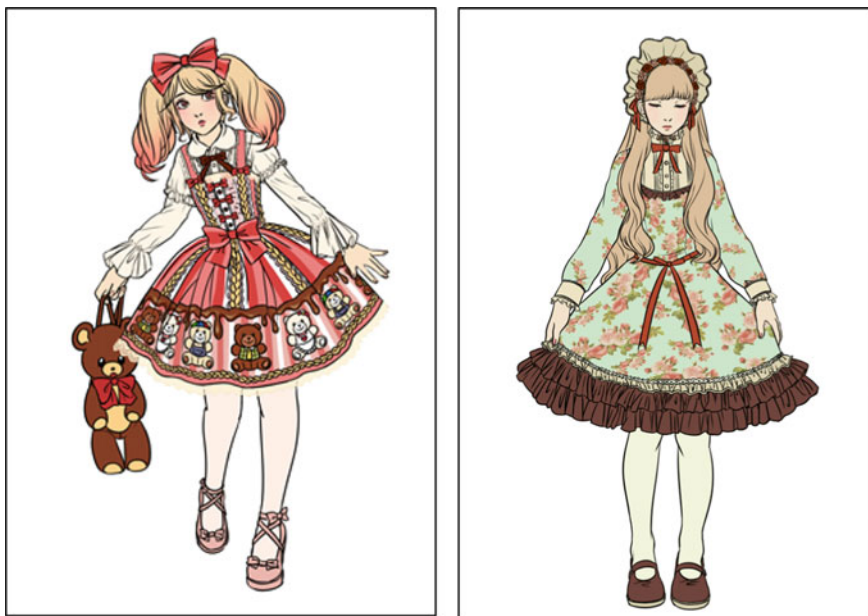


Fig. 2.9 Ama-Loli and classical Lolita (*Illustration* Pandita Watanachariya, and used with permission)



Fig. 2.10 Goth-Loli fashion (*Illustration* Thitiporn Yaisemsan and Pandita Watanachariya, and used with permission)

Fig. 2.11 Typical gal
(*Illustration* Pandita Watanachariya and used with permission)



The core generation of gal fashion is JK (“*Joshi-Kousei*” meaning high-school girls) to whom singers Namie Amuro (1977–) and Ayumi Hamasaki (1978–) are charismatic symbols. Unlike Lolita, gal fashion attracts young men, and it is not a trend of girls for themselves. The word “*kawaii*” fits more to Lolita, but gal can also be called *kawaii* as a different flow of fashion.

There are different types of gal fashion. In 1990s, typical behaviors among young women of around 20 years old or higher startled the world with such behavior as smoking in public, reading tabloids in trains, drinking at *izakaya*, enjoying *pachinko* (Japanese-style pinball machines using small metal balls played in noisy game parlors usually inhabited by men), *etc.*, that have been typical behavioral patterns for men in their 40s and 50s. The new word *oyaji*-gal was born in comics by Yutsuko Chusonji (1962–2005) to describe these young women. But *oyaji* gal women were not recognized as *kawaii*.

Contrary to *oyaji* gal, *ko*-gal, a new type of gal fashion, was born. *Ko* means small or young, and *ko*-gal girls were mainly high-school students and junior-high students. These girls changed their school uniform to “Gal” fashion sometimes in public restrooms and were seen gathering around entertainment zones of the city.

At the end of 1990s, *yamamba* fashion appeared, with girls who tanned their faces to brown (it is called *ganguro* meaning “dark face”) and bleached their hair. Eye makeup with wide white eyeliner was another feature.

Hime-gal (princess girl) is another type of gal that appeared in the mid-2000s. They are also called *age-jou* (*ageha* ladies), because they are influenced by the magazine *Koakuma-Ageha* (a little devil women). This magazine features young women working at *kyaba-kra* (cabaret clubs) who serve alcoholic beverages to men and chat with them. One of the prominent features of this fashion is *mori-gami* (enlarged hair at the top of the head).

In short, gal is a fashion trend among girls and young women whose fashion and makeup are unique, and the central location of this fashion is Shibuya. Gal-fashion fans, of course, do this for their own satisfaction, but many of the gal followers enjoyed playing with men. The range of age group is a bit narrow compared to Lolita fashion, including young women as well as girls, as shown in Fig. 2.12.

2.4.3 Generic *Kawaii*

Generic *kawaii* is a tendency that is characteristic among most women and some men (Fig. 2.13). The fashion described in Fig. 2.13 is not that of Lolita nor of gal. This kind of fashion can be found more frequently than the Lolita and gal fashion. It is not culturally specific among Japanese girls and young women, but is accepted by many of them as their daily *kawaii* fashion.

Most frequently, the word “*kawaii*” is similar to attractive, beautiful, lovable, matching, distinctive, unique, and other adjectives. If someone wishes to describe the fashion, makeup, personality, and other characteristics of a person, *kawaii* is a safe term that will not trigger unpleasantness. In an extreme case, even when one

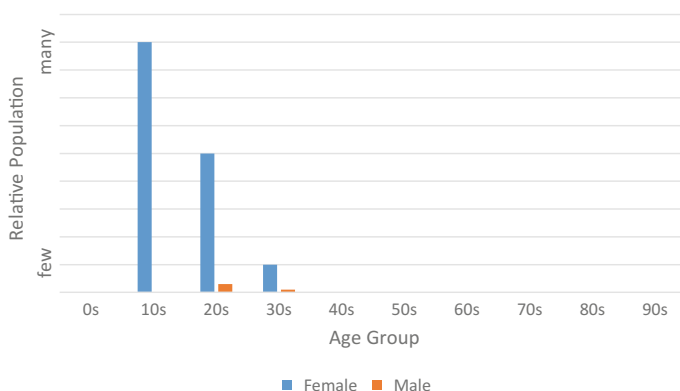


Fig. 2.12 Gal fashion is a trend among girls and young women

Fig. 2.13 Typical generic *kawaii* (Illustration Pandita Watanachariya and used with permission)



sees a baby who does not look cute, the expression “Oh, your baby is *kawaii*! (because it is a baby)” is used.

This type of *kawaii* is somewhat related to the psycho-physical *kawaii*, especially in the case of babies and small accessories. However, regarding the generic *kawaii*, there are many exceptions. For example, the size of the object should not always be small. Character costumes such as *Funassy* and *Kumamon*, which are called *yuru-chara* (loose character) and are large-sized because there is a person

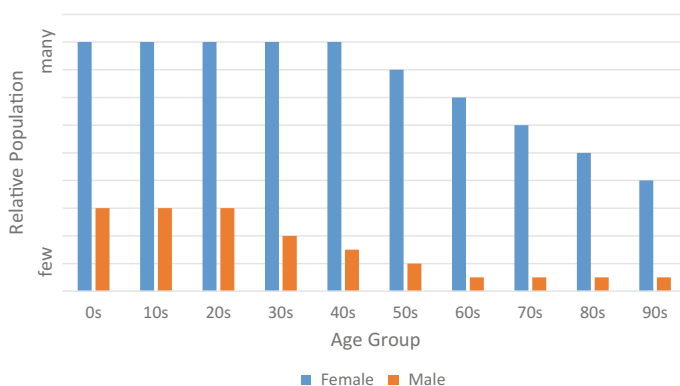


Fig. 2.14 Generic *kawaii* can be found among most women and some men in Japan

inside the costume, are regarded as *kawaii*. These are the generic *kawaii* type. In addition, grown-ups can be called *kawaii*, and it is not unusual to say, “This old man/woman is *kawaii*.” Furthermore, some men can be described as *kawaii* especially when they are young. These trends are expressed in Fig. 2.14. Note that, again, the chart is showing just a rough estimate and is not based on any statistical survey.

2.4.4 Other Types of *Kawaii*

“*Kawaii*” as used in Japanese culture, has generated many variations as follows.

2.4.4.1 *Yume-Kawaii*

Yume-kawaii (Fig. 2.15) is a fashion term that means a dream-like *kawaii* and is close to the concept of Lolita (Fig. 2.9). Colors used for this fashion are not strong or vivid but pastel colors, which are pale, light, and soft. Preferred visual themes include clouds, insects, stars, unicorns, *etc.* Because this is a fashion trend, some Lolita girls and women wear a dress with these visual themes.

2.4.4.2 *Kimo-Kawaii*

Kimo-kawaii is a concept that is eerie or creepy. At the same time, *kimo-kawaii* has something *kawaii*, as can be seen in Fig. 2.16. This is not a clothing fashion style, and no one wears this kind of fashion. This is a style applied to objects, including



Fig. 2.15 *Yume-kawaii* examples (Illustration Thitiporn Yaisemsan, and used with permission)



Fig. 2.16 *Kimo-kawaii* examples (Illustration Thitiporn Yaisemsan, and used with permission)

dolls and illustration. However, sometimes, an entertainer whose atmosphere is somewhat creepy is called *Kimo-Kawaii*.

2.4.4.3 *Gro-Kawaii*

Gro-kawaii is a concept that is similar to *kimo-kawaii*. As can be seen in Fig. 2.17, *gro-kawaii* is much more grotesque and is related to sadism more than the creepiness of *kimo-kawaii*, but it is still a bit *kawaii*.

2.4.4.4 *Ero-Kawaii*

Ero-kawaii is a combination of eroticism and *kawaii* as shown in Fig. 2.18. Because images of *ero-kawaii* are half-naked, *ero-kawaii* girls and women cannot be frequently seen on the street but can be found in magazines, photographs, and movies.

2.4.4.5 *Busu-Kawaii*

Busu-kawaii is applied to girls and women who are ugly, “fugly” (extremely ugly), or unattractive, but are somewhat *kawaii* (Fig. 2.19). This is not a fashion style but is an overall description by men of a girl or woman.



Fig. 2.17 *Gro-kawaii* examples (Illustration Thitiporn Yaisensen, and used with permission)



Fig. 2.18 *Ero-Kawaii* examples (Illustration Thitiporn Yaisensen, and used with permission)



Fig. 2.19 *Busu-kawaii* examples (Illustration Thitiporn Yaisensen, and used with permission)

2.5 *Kawaii* Culture Today

2.5.1 *Related Concepts*

In this subsection, we explain several concepts that are related to *kawaii*.

2.5.1.1 *Moe* (萌え)

Moe (萌え) originated in such subcultures as *animé*, *manga*, and game software around the 1990s and is now used in wider contexts. “*Moe*” means having a strong preference or favor. As a result, “*Moe*” represents a positive feeling or attachment. *Suki* (好き) means a general sense of preference and “*Moe*” means a stronger sense of preference. “*Moe*” is narrower and deeper than the general term “*Suki*.” The origin of “*Moe*” is a description of plants growing from a seed, thus implying the rise of strong feelings.

Sometimes *moe* has a sexual connotation. For example, young *kawaii* girls wearing the school uniform or the shop-assistant uniform gives rise to pedophilic *moe* feelings.

2.5.1.2 *Otaku* (おたく)

Otaku (おたく) is a lover of pop culture and sub-cultures including *manga*, *animé*, sci-fi, games, pop idols, Internet, train models, dolls, *etc.* The term is similar to the English word geek or nerd, but does not completely match to either of them. Many *otaku* boys and men (and sometimes girls and women) can be found in Akihabara, Tokyo, where electronics are sold. They usually have some obsessive feeling for the target item or concept. *Moe* is one of the characteristic feelings among *otaku* people. As a result, *otaku* people love *kawaii* but in a somewhat different sense from that of Lolita people.

2.5.1.3 *Meido* (メイド)

“*Meido*” (メイド) comes from the English word “maid.” However, among *otaku*, it means young waitresses of *cafés* or restaurants who wear a uniform, especially an apron dress. In Akihabara and other area, there are *meido*-cafés where many *meido* girls can be found. The term refers to a kind of attachment to girls or women in uniforms.

2.5.1.4 Sailor *Fuku* (セーラー服)

Sailor *fuku* (セーラー服) is the typical school uniform for young girls at junior high schools and high schools. It literally means a sailor suit, but actually is the uniform for girls, because the middy blouse and skirt in dark blue color with white stripes looks like a sailor's uniform.

Sailor *fuku* is preferred by girls themselves as well as *Otaku*. Girls think it to be *kawaii*. However, sometimes girls regard the style as a symbol of the restraint in school and society, and they change their uniforms to more casual fashions. On the other hand, *Otaku* guys love the style, because of a fetish feeling towards the uniform in a similar way to *Meido*.

2.5.1.5 *Cosplay* (コスプレ)

Cosplay (コスプレ) is a shortened Japanese form of “costume play” in which people wear the dress or uniform of a hero or heroine of *animé* or games to disguise themselves. The motivation of those who do *cosplay* is to have fun by identifying themselves with the hero or heroine. A wider meaning of *cosplay* includes those who wear the uniform of *meido* or sailor *fuku*, although they are not really working as a maid or are not really school girls. Many *cosplay* people can be found in *Comiket*, or the comic market, which is held twice each year in Tokyo.

2.5.2 *Desire to be Kawaii*

In relation to the fact that *kawaii* mainly refers to female culture, the result of a survey conducted by Yomoda (2006) as shown in Fig. 2.20 is interesting. He conducted a questionnaire survey about *kawaii* with a total of 245 Japanese university students (89 male and 156 female), for whom the ages ranged from 18 to 23. One of the results shown is that those who want to be called *kawaii* are 68% female and only 26% male. Notably, informants aged 18 wanting to be called *kawaii* were 78% female and only 15% male. These results show that *kawaii* is a gender-specific cultural concept, and females tend to become *kawaii* for themselves, while males tend to love *kawaii* (girls and women).

2.5.3 *Kawaii and Beautiful*

In western countries, it is said that beauty is generally more important and valuable than cuteness or prettiness for girls and women. Yomoda (2006) wrote of an episode in which he was warned not to use the word “cute” to a woman (not to a small child). The female editor of a magazine told him that the use of “cute” for a

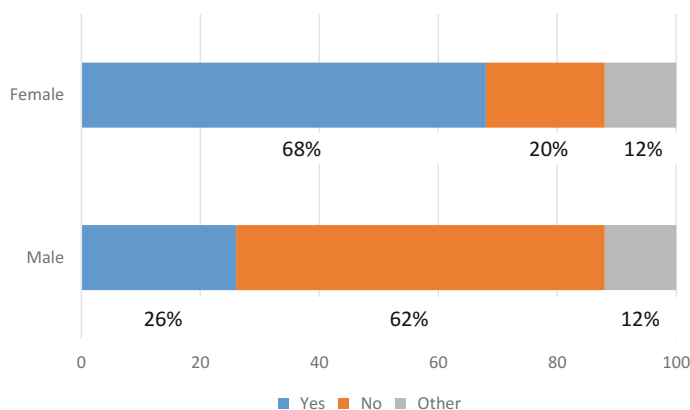


Fig. 2.20 The chart shows the proportion of answers to the question “Do you want to be called *kawaii*?” [Adapted from the data of Yomoda (2006)]

woman may be regarded as a discrimination from the viewpoint of political correctness. In other words, cuteness is valuable only for children.

However, in Japan, as shown in Figs. 2.7 and 2.12, it seems that girls and young women put more emphasis on *kawaii* than beauty. The age that Japanese women start using the word beauty is after they have graduated from the age of using *kawaii*, roughly speaking after their 20s.

For confirming this hypothesis, a small-sized questionnaire research was conducted by coauthor Masaaki using 228 photographs including female actors, *animé* characters, animals, entertainers, *etc.* (Kurosu and Hashizume 2016) A total of 89 university students (55 male and 34 female) participated as informants. They were presented with photographs one-by-one and were asked if they know the person, character, or object (by answering 0 or 1) and to rate the degree of *kawaii*, beauty, and preference on a five-point rating scale.

Table 2.2 shows part of the results of the questionnaire research survey described in (Kurosu and Hashizume 2016). The column “Know” is an average of “don’t know it” as 0 and “know it” as 1. Three other columns, *Kawaii*, Beautiful, and Preference show the average rating score for the five-point scale. The lowest row is the result of *T*-test (*p* value) between male informants and female informants. Pale yellow cells means the *p* value was lower than or equal to 0.01.

The result for Mickey Mouse is easy to understand. Female students preferred Mickey more than male students and rated it as *kawaii* for 4.32, while beautiful for 2.98. The result for the flower (Peony) is also reasonable. Informants gave higher ratings for beautiful than *kawaii*.

The result for human paintings and human photographs are interesting. While informants gave very high ratings of 4.03 for Mona Lisa on beauty, they gave low rating of 1.83 on *kawaii* on average. It is easy to understand considering the generally accepted recognition that Mona Lisa is one of the most beautiful paintings in the world. However, in terms of actresses, including Marilyn Monroe, Audrey

Table 2.2 Part of the results of the questionnaire research survey described in Kurosu and Hashizume (2016)

	<i>Know</i>	<i>Kawaii</i>	<i>Beautiful</i>	<i>Preference</i>
<i>Mickey Mouse</i>				
Total	0.94	4.29	2.91	4.09
Male	0.90	3.70	2.60	3.50
Female	0.98	4.32	2.98	4.32
<i>T</i> -test (<i>p</i> value)	0.59	0.07	0.72	0.09
<i>Flower (Peony)</i>				
Total	0.31	3.07	3.72	3.18
Male	0.29	3.07	3.73	3.25
Female	0.35	3.00	3.71	3.06
<i>T</i> -test (<i>p</i> value)	0.55	0.95	0.94	0.46
<i>Mona Lisa</i>				
Total	0.97	1.83	4.03	2.76
Male	0.90	1.80	4.00	3.00
Female	1.00	1.84	4.04	2.67
<i>T</i> -test (<i>p</i> value)	0.34	0.91	0.93	0.40
<i>Marilyn Monroe</i>				
Total	0.80	3.00	3.96	3.30
Male	0.82	2.89	3.71	3.11
Female	0.76	3.18	4.35	3.59
<i>T</i> -test (<i>p</i> value)	0.56	0.24	0.01	0.08
<i>Audrey Hepburn</i>				
Total	0.39	3.53	3.97	3.43
Male	0.25	3.24	3.67	3.18
Female	0.62	4.00	4.44	3.82
<i>T</i> -test (<i>p</i> value)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
<i>Scarlett Johansson</i>				
Total	0.19	3.13	3.87	3.26
Male	0.22	3.20	3.78	3.33
Female	0.15	3.03	4.00	3.15
<i>T</i> -test (<i>p</i> value)	0.40	0.46	0.40	0.40

Hepburn, and Scarlett Johansson, the *kawaii* scores rise up almost to the level of beautiful (although beautiful scores a bit higher than *kawaii*). Japanese university students regarded these actresses as *kawaii* as well as beautiful.

These results suggest the necessity for future comparative studies in different countries and cultures. The result of the comparative studies may show us the differences (or similarities) of *kawaii*-related concepts in Japan and other countries. It may lead to the conclusion that *kawaii* cannot simply be translated as cute or pretty or *mignon* (French) or *carina* (Italian).

2.5.4 *Kawaii and Horror*

Sometimes, something that was designed to look *kawaii* and to be loved by young girls provokes a horrifying feeling. A doll is a typical example. *Kawaii* dolls in Fig. 2.21 may trigger the sensation of fear depending on the viewer's psychological condition and the context. There are many movies in Japan and foreign countries that focus on the horror of dolls [examples include *Tourist Trap* (1979), *Child's Play* (1988), *Dolls* (1987), *Hanako-san in the Toilet* (2003), *The Doll Master* (2005), *etc.*].

The psychological mechanism is not yet clear but the hypothesis of Uncanny Valley proposed by Mori (1970) may explain this phenomenon. His hypothesis is not about the doll but about the humanoid robot. However, the basic mechanism of Uncanny Valley may be applied to dolls. The basic point of his hypothesis is this: as the humanoid becomes more human-like, it will be positively accepted by human beings. However, when its similarity to the human becomes higher, it will be perceived as uncanny. In any case, this theme needs to be analyzed further to clarify the relationship between *kawaii* and horror.



Fig. 2.21 Japanese antique doll and German antique bisque doll (Photo Masaaki Kurosu, owned by Masaaki Kurosu.)

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have discussed *kawaii* in Japan from many different perspectives. *Kawaii* culture that has its own historical origins far back in the tenth century is now widely accepted throughout the world. There is a possibility that *kawaii* sensitivity is universal, and Japan has simply been the first to exploit it. However, *kawaii* is not completely identical with such foreign concepts as cute, pretty, *mignon* and *carina*. It is not yet clear that the Japanese *kawaii* concept is accepted by foreigners based on a proper understanding of the core concept. It is likely that only the surface layer of culture is acknowledged, accepted, and assimilated outside of Japan.

We have distinguished three different *kawaii* concepts. First is the psychophysical *kawaii*, which must be common among all human beings, because it is based on an instinctive sensitivity. Second is the cultural *kawaii*. What is now prevalent in the world is this type of *kawaii*. In this context, two types of *kawaii* girls and young women, *i.e.*, Lolita and Gal, are clarified. It is the culture of girls and young women for themselves and by themselves. The third type is the generic *kawaii*, for which most women and some men use the term *kawaii* in their everyday life. This type of *kawaii* is generic, because the word is used in different situations that could be described by other words such as attractive, beautiful, notable, *etc.*, as well as cute or pretty.

Finally, we discussed some related words and the attitudes of males and females to the concept of *kawaii*. Based on the result of the questionnaire research, Japanese tend to describe actresses as *kawaii* at almost the same level of beauty.

Further studies should be conducted to clarify the concept of *kawaii* from such social sciences as psychology, sociology, anthropology, and *kansei* engineering.

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