



SPECIAL FEATURE:

Japanese Pop Culture

To the Next Stage

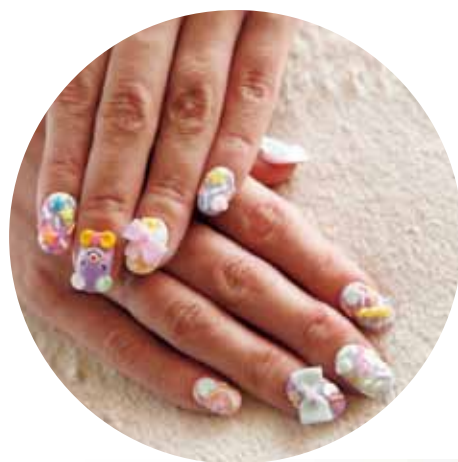


Japanese pop culture encompasses fashion, anime, manga, and more, and is beloved not just in Japan but also by people all over the world. This type of culture is centered on young people and has grown more and more sophisticated as it has been nurtured and refined in everyday life. In this issue, we will examine the current state of Japanese pop culture and how Japanese people appreciate and enjoy it.

Sharing the Culture of Kawaii with the World

Even within Japan, which is home to many fashion styles, Harajuku in particular is famous for being a place where people with unique fashion styles gather. Kyary Pamyu Pamyu got her start in Harajuku and quickly rose to stardom. After she had her picture taken by a magazine by chance, she became a fashion model. Her popularity has now spread throughout Japan and is growing throughout the world.

“Harajuku fashion isn’t about imitating somebody else. Everyone has unique ideas and individuality. Everyone in Harajuku



TOP: Kyary Pamyu Pamyu performing her solo live at the Nippon Budokan in Tokyo in 2012. Photo by: Asobi System Co., Ltd.

LEFT: A three-dimensional design, referred to as *pukupuku* (pudgy) nails, that has acrylic ribbons, bears, and other elements added onto it. Photo by Chikura Shino

BOTTOM: Q-pot, a brand known for its realistic accessories modeled after sweets. Photo by kuma



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The life-size, 18-meter-tall Gundam statue at Gundam Front Tokyo

wears what they themselves think is kawaii. That’s actually very important. I hope that someday everyone will be able to wear the clothes that they like not only in Harajuku, but throughout Japan.”

Kyary Pamyu Pamyu debuted as a musician in 2011. She has created her own colorful, pop-style world that also has a kind of edginess to it. Her one-of-a-kind appeal has transcended national boundaries—she became the top ranking Japanese artist ever on the Finnish and Belgian iTunes electronic music charts.

Kawaii Everywhere!

The Japanese thirst for kawaii is unquenchable, and new forms of kawaii are being created one after another. One example of this is the growing popularity—especially among young women—of accessories that are modeled after macaroons, cakes, biscuits, and other sweets. The secret behind their popularity lies in their colorfulness, pop style, and delicious appearance.

Another example is nail art, which started in the United States and has now fused with Japanese kawaii sensibilities and been transformed into a unique subculture found nowhere else in the world. Nail artist Nakayama Chieko explains: “Overseas nail art is usually just about making the nails a different color, but Japanese people like detailed nail art, so Japanese nail art is nothing if not elaborate. I don’t think people are motivated by a desire to pursue the latest style as much as they are by a desire to design their nails in a way that suits them.”

Dive into Pop Culture Museums

There are pop culture museums all over Japan that offer intimate presentations of the worlds depicted in popular anime and manga. Visitors can enjoy realistic character statues and spaces that re-create the world of a particular fictional work. Original merchandise is also available. These museums are beloved by children and adults alike.

One example of a pop culture museum is Gundam Front Tokyo, which is located in Koto City in Tokyo. The museum focuses on *Mobile Suit Gundam*, which is an anime that takes place in space and depicts wars waged using special types of “mobile suits”—humanoid robot weapons. Gundam is the name of a series of special mobile suits. Inside Gundam Front Tokyo, you’ll find a number of different ways to enjoy the Gun-

dam universe, including life-size Gundam busts, photo spots where you can take pictures with characters from the series, and exhibits of materials used in the production of various Gundam works.

Vocaloids: Leading the Way to a New Music Scene

The popularity of Hatsune Miku, a virtual pop star created in Japan, is now spreading not only throughout Japan but also throughout the world. Hatsune Miku actually refers to a software program that gained attention because it used a singing synthesizer system called Vocaloid that was developed by a Japanese instrument manufacturer and had a picture of a girl who looks like the main character of an anime on the package. By inputting lyrics and melodies into a PC, users can create pieces of music with the exact vocals and choruses they want. As users come up with their own unique songs to make Hatsune Miku perform and upload the songs to video-sharing websites and other sites, countless variations of individual songs appear on the Internet.

Through the sale of compilation CDs, live performances, and collaborations with businesses, the popularity of Hatsune Miku has risen to that of living artists, and perhaps even beyond. Through the Internet, that popularity has spread throughout Europe, America, and Asia. In the United States, Hatsune Miku was used in a commercial for a Japanese car in 2011.



Hatsune Miku,
one of the Vocaloids

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