

2.4. **Exoticization and internationalization in the cultural history of the fashion district Harajuku**

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× **Abstract**

In my research on the significance of the Tokyo district Harajuku for the fashion scene, the discrepancy between its limited dimensions of barely two square kilometers and its great national and international relevance in pop culture is striking. If one tries to approach its special logic, historical origins and attempts to understand its influence, it is this contrast that distinguishes the district from the rest of Tokyo. Throughout its development, the special role of the international is one of the red threads that emerges. Whether it is direct contact with the foreign, its “authentic” representation or exoticizing imagination, in any case this construct is an effective element in shaping the identity of this neighborhood. Based on interviews with formative actors from Harajuku’s history, media content and observations made on site, my article develops a brief cultural history of Harajuku from the post-war period onwards.

Keywords: Harajuku, street fashion, urban history, exoticization, internationalization.

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1. **Introduction**

Harajuku has become a household name nationally and internationally for colorful fashion, creative youth culture and lifestyle trends. As a creative free space, it’s one of the highlights in every Japan travel guide, attracting Japanese and foreign guests alike. International luxury labels such as Louis Vuitton showcase their flagship stores along Omotesandō boulevard, and the shopping sprees of stars such as Kanye West and Kim Kardashian find a wide audience. Harajuku is also significant for Japanese people: Series such as Mika Ninagawa’s Netflix Original *Followers* find in the neighborhood a fitting setting for the stylish daily lives of its creative protagonists. Teenagers from all parts of the country make pilgrimages to this small part of Shibuya-ku, Tokyo, to try out the latest food trend and, of course, take the Instagram photos to prove it.

Through this wild mixture of bubble tea stores, designer boutiques, and subculture trends, runs a common thread: Harajuku is perceived as set apart by its intense contact with foreign countries, both direct and indirect. The international and the exotic are two central ways of making sense of this special connection.

In this article, I will address the question of what effects internationalization and exoticization have had on Harajuku from the postwar period until today. At the same time, I want to shed light on what Harajuku itself contributes to these processes, both within Japan and in the rest of the world. To what extent does it serve as a driving force, a space of possibilities, or a passive recipient for exoticization and internationalization?

2. **Concepts and methods**

To better grasp Harajuku in its pop-cultural function as a fashion and lifestyle hub from a cultural studies perspective, it makes sense to address some of the grounding assumptions of my research.

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A first factor is the prevailing understanding of 'foreign' itself in this particular context: In Japan, a few select countries and regions tend to serve as fixed reference points in fashion. Once they become strongly associated with a particular brand or style, the references to them are usually repetitive. Studies mention brands from Great Britain, as well as from France and Italy or the American West and East Coast as examples that have gone through this process of fusing country-cliché and brand image (Marx, 2015; Hata, 2004; Goodrum, 2009).

The processes of internationalization and exoticization help shape this special mode of referencing the foreign. Both principles play a role in defining the possibilities for contact and exchange with the fashionable foreign country. They are by no means mutually exclusive, but rather form endpoints of a scale on which practices of engagement with the foreign fall. Nevertheless, it is analytically beneficial to distinguish them.

I define internationalization as concrete connections and exchanges with foreign countries. Business contacts, travel, and visiting and participating in fashion weeks or trade fairs are important activities which people working in the fashion and lifestyle sector perform. Furthermore, such fashion cosmopolitans require a good knowledge of the international fashion scene, for example of labels and designers, trends and collections, pop cultural influences.

While participation in professional events is usually limited to members of the industry, all these aspects are also of great importance to people interested in fashion. Even fashion media aimed at a more general audience communicate international expertise to some degree and presuppose some prior knowledge of it.

In contrast to this concrete, well-informed internationalization, I employ the concept of exoticization, which stands for an imagined 'foreign country' in fashion and lifestyle. Exoticization is characterized by abstraction and a highly selective perception: individual aspects associated with a country or region become decontextualized and distorted, then are repeated as tropes.

This is evident, for example, in the selection of countries perceived as fashionable foreign countries. In Japan, these are by no means all the countries in the world that are active on the fashion market. Rather, it is still primarily a few central Western 'fashion cities' (Breward, 2010; Breward & Gilbert, 2006) that stand in for their countries at large and determine their image: Paris for France, London for England, New York, and in some cases Los Angeles for the United States serve as synecdoche. Their fashion shows, fairs, stars, and street snaps keep Western Europe and North America the centers of attention (Jansen, 2020). The cities serve as shorthand for fashion and taste, are used to promote both individual products and entire brands. Goodrum, for example, analyzes this behavior for the Japanese market: in her research on the success of the British brands Mulberry and Paul Smith, she found that a specifically Japanese idea of Britishness does not only inform the reception of the brands by the customer, but also the complete process from the idea of a garment to its presentation in the store (Goodrum, 2009).

Another important perspective on the Japanese fashion world shows, in turn, its perception in Europe and America. The success of the young Japanese avant-garde of the 1970s and 1980s in Paris, as well as the career of the only Asian couturière, Hanae Mori, are all vital developments in the 20th century. The collections of the 'Big Three', Issey Miyake, Yohji Yamamoto, and Rei Kawakubo, had the postmodern claim to break through the boundaries between West and East, fashion and anti-fashion, and modernity and anti-modernity, and to overturn the existing rules of fashion and clothing (Kawamura, 2004). They succeeded in this – the monochrome, asymmetrical, architectural-looking designs, with their holes and rips, shocked the Parisian fashion world, spurring enthusiasm but also rejection. The often-cited term 'Hiroshima chic' is a reference to Kondo's (2010) observations that racism or orientalist clichés often resonated in international reviews, and characteristics of the designs were readily attributed to aspects of Japanese culture such as Zen or kimono.

Even if the revolutionaries had shaken Parisian fashion to its core, continued success was only possible by integrating themselves into the existing system of the fashion world there, for example through regular participation in the shows. The acquisition of social, economic as well as symbolic capital according to the rules of the Parisian 'fashion worlds' (following Becker's (1982) 'art worlds') secured their recognition and that of the following (Kawamura, 2004).

These complex loops of perception can be observed in Tokyo as well. As a capital city, it shows how self-perception and perception of others, exoticizing and internationalizing tendencies can influence what is on offer, and how its neighborhoods make use of it in their own ways. A city, as a "bounded space that is densely settled and has a relatively large, culturally heterogeneous population" (Gottdiener & Budd, 2005, p. 4), intensifies the interactions of its users through these same factors: the streets and other public places serve as stages on which residents can act and interact.

An important aspect of this urban culture is walkability (Gottdiener & Budd, 2005), which makes urban space widely accessible and attractive. It promotes the possibility of its co-creation through everyday use, as described by de Certeau in his theories on *walking* (Certeau 2002). The built space of the city becomes a social space for the interaction of its users and is at the same time shaped by them.

Another central concept for my analysis draws on de Certeau's interpretation of synecdoche and asyndeton as central organizing principles of spatial practices in this creation of social space. He explains the former as the use of a word in place of the larger whole containing it. He describes asyndeton as the omission of connecting words between meaning-bearing words. Transferred to the spatial practice of *walking*, it causes a selection and fragmentation of the space traversed and its perception, so that certain places appear as important, while the path between them receives little attention (Certeau, 2002). According to the principle of synecdoche, not only does the fashion city of Tokyo stand for the whole of Japan in the international perception, but a few neighborhoods such as Harajuku stand in for the whole city in a second step.

Even Harajuku itself is often not perceived in its entirety: Here, both synecdoche and asyndeton are active in parallel, which makes defining the area even more difficult. It is not clearly delimited, as it is officially part of the Shibuya-ku Jingūmae district. Nevertheless, there is a wide-spread informal understanding of what constitutes Harajuku: focal points such as the wooden building of the old Harajuku Station, the narrow shopping street Takeshita-dōri, Omotesandō boulevard, and department stores such as Laforet serve as symbols for the entire neighborhood. Residential buildings or local stores such as greengrocers or florists that also exist within its customary boundaries, however, are associated with this name by only a few people – they are the omitted links in the sense of the asyndeton. Moreover, this selective perception also applies to food and restaurants: Harajuku is inseparably associated with international sweets and snacks such as crêpes, while traditional Japanese restaurants, which do exist, are hardly ever mentioned.

Harajuku's synecdochic focal points further serve as commonly understood waymarkers, as my analysis of maps with the keyword 'Harajuku' from Japanese-language fashion, lifestyle, and travel magazines has shown. Here, I found that some landmarks and central routes exist that are equally familiar to domestic tourists and members of fashion subcultures. Based on these assumptions, Harajuku is currently located in Shibuya-ku Jingūmae 1, 3, 4-chōme, and parts of 5 and 6.

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After defining my study area in this way, I collected data on the historical development of the district through expert interviews with fashion professionals as well as archival between April 2017 and February 2019. Following the work of Obayashi et al. (2002), I focused primarily on the coverage of fashion and lifestyle magazines.

To complement this, I also conducted on-site participant observation, including attending monthly trend observations and consumer interviews conducted by ACROSS (part of Parco's fashion and culture think tank), as well as substitute work at a fashion store and regular visits.

3. Historical development of Harajuku

3.1 Foundations: Harajuku until the 1950s

Until the end of World War II, Harajuku was of interest only to its immediate residents for most of the year. Its brief time in the spotlight came with each New Year's morning when many Tokyoites visited the Meiji Jingū shrine there. It had opened in 1920 on the grounds of Yoyogi Park and was dedicated to the Meiji Emperor and Empress.

Along with the shrine came Harajuku Station, which connected the area to the Yamanote loop line. A small temple town offering snacks and souvenirs was built across from it. Today's Omotesandō boulevard served as the access road (Ohta, 2016). The shrine also included the Meiji Shrine Athletic Stadium, built in 1924 in Meijijingū Gaien. Sporting events were held here under the auspices of the Emperor of Japan.

The role of Yoyogi Park in the development of Harajuku is not limited to the shrine. Before World War II, it was used as Yoyogi Drill Ground as well as for other army facilities (Tagsold, 2010). During the Occupation, it was confiscated and used to house higher-ranking U.S. Army personnel, because of its accessibility along National Route 246 / Oyama Road and its proximity to downtown Tokyo. With the Washington Heights base came stores and facilities to cater to Americans and other foreign personnel (Yoshimi, 2019). Cafés and restaurants appeared along Omotesandō boulevard, offering familiar Western cuisine and outdoor seating rare elsewhere in Tokyo.

One key locale that opened in this period is the Oriental Bazaar. Originally an antique shop in the Nihonbashi district, it moved to its present location on Omotesandō boulevard in 1951 with the intention of selling souvenirs to soldiers and other foreign visitors. The owners designed the exterior of the store to look like a shrine and sold earthenware and folding screens to match foreign perceptions of Japanese culture. According to the company website, it was also an American customer who gave the store its name, still used today, shortly after it came to Harajuku (Across, 1995; Oriental Bazaar, n.d.).

After Tokyo was named the site of the 1964 Olympics, the Yoyogi Park land was returned to Japan. A new stadium was built there, and the former army base Washington Heights was used as the Olympic Village for athletes from around the world. Media attention helped the area gain widespread notoriety and made it the first point of contact with Western culture and lifestyle for many Japanese (Hirakawa, 2007).

Import stores, cafés, a drive-through burger restaurant at the corner of Meiji dōri and Omotesandō streets, and their non-Japanese signage gave visitors the impression of being transported to America or Europe. Omotesandō was consequently nicknamed 'Japan's Champs-Élysées' (Mabuchi, 1989).

While buildings such as the Central Apartments, completed in 1957, already provided high-quality living space for the army and embassy personnel, the neighborhood now also became home to the most expensive apartments built for Japanese at the time: the mansion boom experienced its superlative here, in the form of the Coop Olympia. The most expensive apartment, with a direct view of the park, air-conditioning, four elevators, concierge service and a rooftop pool, likely went to actor Machiko Kyō of Rashomon fame. It became known as the first 'oku-shon' (100 yen), or one hundred-million-yen mansion (Across, 1995).

During this period, there are numerous indications of an exoticization and internationalization of the neighborhood: the U.S. army quarters, and the import stores, cafés, and restaurants directed at their residents were a first point of contact with foreign countries for many Japanese and, in this course, already offered wealthier individuals contact with foreign lifestyles. This concrete contact with foreigners and foreign culture constituted an early form of the internationalization of the neighborhood.

Traces of exoticization can be found in the Oriental Bazaar: Here, not only were souvenirs corresponding to common Japanese clichés available, but the store's operators also saw an opportunity for sales not possible with Japanese customers in the immediate postwar period. In addition to the exoticization of Japanese culture by foreign buyers, the use of conscious self-exoticization by the Japanese operators as a deliberate marketing strategy was also evident.

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3.2 1960s / 1970s: Harajuku and the youth and fashion scene

The Harajuku of the 1960s was first shaped by the 1964 Olympics, as the accommodation of athletes in the previous army buildings led to a further short-term increase in international visitors and media attention and gave the neighborhood another striking landmark in the form of Kenzo Tange's Yoyogi National Gymnasium. Tokyo's affluent youth was drawn to Harajuku: Starting in 1965, the wide Omotesandō boulevard, at the time still without its landscaped median strip, offered Tokyo's wealthy youth perfect conditions for nighttime car races. During the day, they could show off their imported sports cars here, stroll along the avenue and meet in the cafés or go dancing. The media reported on this new youth movement, christened Harajuku-zoku, which attracted up to 4,000 participants, but complaints from residents about noise pollution from the races and loitering youths kissing in public also increased. These protests led to a residents' movement that, in cooperation with the police, put an end to the car races in the following year (Mabuchi, 1989; Narumi, 2010).

Even in the context of this development, the influence of internationalization is still relatively clear, as places created for a primarily foreign audience were used by wealthy youth in search of lifestyle—an aspect they associated with the international, given the still limited domestic offerings in Japan, which also weren't catering to a younger audience. The first holders of new katakana professions, which transposed fashionable English-language job titles into Japanese - designers, models, talents - also showed interest in Harajuku and began to settle there.

These creatives, who subsequently became the core of the fashion district, knew how to skillfully mix practices of exoticization and internationalization to create a distinctive lifestyle - this was one aspect that increasingly defined Harajuku's flair. Their small group became the avant-garde: expensive trips abroad gave them the opportunity to gather international fashion knowledge and contacts. Upon their return, they cleverly used these resources to give their growing audience in Japan a glimpse of London or Paris. Exoticization was a

factor here, whether it emanated consciously from the side of the well-traveled fashion designers or was a byproduct of the lack of knowledge.

Their central gathering point became the Central Apartments. The stylist Yacco (Yasuko Takahashi), who first came to the Central Apartments as a visitor, but returned as a resident, credits what was actually a 'fairly mundane building' with having been legendary in its function as a gathering place for many young creatives. In retrospect, she also emphasizes its 'foreign atmosphere' (Takahashi, 2006).

On the lower floor, in addition to cafés and restaurants, Mademoiselle Nonnon, one of Japan's first boutiques, opened in 1966. Shortly after, Hitomi Ôgawa's shop MILK followed, just a few doors down. Both stores "had a small storefront, were narrow, and only 6 or 7 meters deep" (Takahashi, 2006, p. 124).

According to Hirakawa, they were thus both examples of a "distinct 'Harajuku' feel" and representatives of a particular business model that was to become more widespread.

I recall a particular manual of the time, titled something like 'How to Succeed in the Fashion Business', which advised the hopeful to rent a small room in an inexpensive apartment block in the backstreets of Harajuku (now known as Ura-Hara), set up an atelier, and start working... Easily mistaken for overseas brands, the collections would then be sold wholesale to small shops. Another route was for designers to rent cheap commercial space in Takeshita-dôri and open their own retail shop.

(Hirakawa, 2007, p. 23).

The stylist Non-Nakamura also emphasized the role of these small businesses, often run by families and friends, in my interview. Unlike in Shibuya or Shinjuku, she said, everything here came from a single source, and combined ateliers and retail stores were able to quickly build their own reputations (interview by author, 5 September 2017).

Hitomi Ôgawa, who founded the MILK boutique with her two siblings in 1970, said she did so because she wanted to express her ideas. She told me that hippies, psychedelic or glam rock cultures had shown them the way and that they wanted to contribute themselves. The location was also clear from the start: Harajuku had hardly any fashion stores at the time, but it was chic, just like its inhabitants, and radiated a 'strange power'. Her creations were inspired by the streets of Paris and London; she sewed what she wanted to wear but couldn't buy in Japan. She cites punk as an example of this: During her visit to London in 1974, she cut up a Harris Tweed jacket and pinned it back together with safety pins. Even today, the influences of this subculture can still be found in her designs (interview by author, 25 September 2017).

This relatively small, close-knit group of creatives inspired each other, shared their experiences abroad and international contacts. This resulted, for example, in the long collaboration between David Bowie and the designer Kansai Yamamoto, as well as the stylist Yasuko Takashi and the photographer Masayoshi Sukita (Godoy & Vartanian, 2007).

These young creatives found a mouthpiece in new fashion magazines such as *an an* (Heibonsha, now Magazine House). The baby boomer generation came of age and moved to the big cities for study or work, their rising incomes allowing for an increasingly high standard of living. Tokyo became a young city that hosted numerous new youth cultures, always in search of new identities and inspirations (Namba, 2007).

These new media also contain aspects of internationalization and exoticization: they take the reader on a journey, showing trends documented worldwide - but they also deliberately filter what is shown in order to make it seem attractive to a Japanese audience. This combined with a lack of contextual knowledge on the part of readers, as well as the inherently selective nature of fashion magazines designed to stage an attractive lifestyle, undoubtedly led to a distortion of the image of foreign countries.

International fashion and pop culture trends were now more widely received, which also increased the demand for the styles they presented. While MILK, for example, offered not only its own productions from the beginning, but also select imported goods (Yasuda, 2015), the late 1970s saw the emergence of stores that specialized purely in the skillful import of fashion and lifestyle goods: on the one hand, the first vintage stores such as Cream Soda appeared on Cat Street. On the other, select stores such as BEAMS made their debut in the district.

The growing imports by select and second-hand stores, as well as cheaper, locally produced copies of those garments, are interesting regarding their role in exoticization and internationalization: The level of fashion knowledge increased. More direct contact with international products, well-informed staff, as well as newly emerging magazines contributed. At the same time, however, an increasing exoticization occurred. Some consumers came to be satisfied with approximate copies of looks and preferred fantasy worlds created by movies to direct contact with foreign countries. A look at Harajuku's visitor numbers is helpful for understanding these opposing developments - unprecedented masses crowded into the small neighborhood. Their interests, social and economic backgrounds, and sources of information became increasingly diverse, with two results. The positions on the scale between internationalization and exoticization became increasingly complex, while Harajuku itself became known as a hybrid. The groundwork had been laid for its perception as international yet Japanese, accessible yet not commonplace.

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3.3 1980s – Harajuku becomes a fashion city of its own

The 1980s brought brands like Yohji Yamamoto or Comme des Garçons to the forefront for Harajuku's fashion avantgarde. While part of their popularity within Japan was also due to the overseas success of the designers, the magazine and had also been supporting many of them for some time, and their brands were now gaining attention as so-called DC brands. (DC brand, short for 'designer's character brand' - the label is headed by a single designer known to the public). According to Across, a near-cult of designers like Kawakubo Rei formed from the 'fashion freaks' among their readers. Many of them became store employees in the wake of the DC boom that followed in the second half of the 1980s, as they were a good fit for the sleek, purist store environments (Across, 1995).

While at first glance this turn to Japanese designers seems to run counter to an increasing focus on exoticized foreign lifestyles, on closer inspection it is indicative of that very trend: as mentioned at the outset with reference to Kawamura's and Kondo's analyses, fashion labels such as Comme des Garçons, which had long been stocked in Harajuku's boutiques, were only noticed by many shoppers in the 1980s after a legitimizing fashion city such as Paris had started to pay attention to them. This illustrates the leading position that continued to be assigned to a narrow range of foreign-fashion countries in matters of style.

The Harajuku of this period benefited from the significant financial opportunities that even young people had at the time (or sought to attain through the use of credit cards) - being dressed head to toe in the works of an internationally known designer or wearing exclusively American imports, impossible before, was now common.

At the same time, fashion and lifestyle expertise was more in demand than ever: In order to make an increasingly extensive and complicated world of offerings accessible and understandable to the public, numerous new magazines sprouted up, reporting in ever more diverse and detailed ways, and existing ones adapted their coverage. Harajuku knew how to fill the resulting expert positions through its network, which had grown since the 1970s. Buyers, employees and stylists were now able to share their specialist knowledge with readers.

In this way, Harajuku's internationalization also continued: The experts were well-traveled and firmly integrated into the international fashion world. Thus, they gained access to information such as trends, new labels, knew the current pop-cultural influences as well as historical role models, and occupied important key positions in globally relevant fashion and media.

3.4 Into the 1990s: Fashion media diversifies

As the designer boom ended, Harajuku's attention increasingly turned to street fashion. This change is interesting in terms of internationalization: while high fashion, as already mentioned, was firmly linked to the traditional fashion system, which Japan accepted by following its fixed system of rules, street fashion was much freer in its development. Street fashion magazines, for example, allowed international and Japanese designers to be presented simultaneously on an equal footing, and fans around the world were paying more and more attention to Japanese labels. So now, more than ever, the movement ran both ways. *Hokoten*, the street closure that took place since the 1970s every Sunday for the benefit of pedestrians had made a name for itself throughout Japan: In addition to dancers and artists, fashion enthusiasts also took the opportunity to see and be seen and to inspire and outdo each other. This resulted in another innovation: street snap magazines.

These photo documentations of well-dressed passers-by were a great advantage for the emerging street fashion-centric magazines: although they invested time in searching for motifs on the street, they received ideas virtually free of charge in return and were able to keep their reporting credible by closely relating to the streets.

Covertly shot photos of such styles had already been appearing in the rather harsh style critique segments of the major magazines in the 1970s. In the mid-1990s, though, Harajuku-based photographer Shoichi Aoki discovered that Japanese youth could now keep up with the fashionistas he had previously photographed while traveling in London or Paris (Aoki in Keet, 2007).

So, he founded *FRUITS*, a magazine dedicated exclusively to the young people of Harajuku, documenting their style experiments, and also acting as a source of inspiration for further developments. To emphasize this, he engaged with them, and asked them to fill out questionnaires: Who is the wearer, where do the clothes and accessories come from, what excites them the most right now, what is the theme of their outfit? Those photographed were free to give or withhold information - but many willingly shared their favorite stores or even advertised their own designs.

3.5 2000 onwards: Harajuku's fashion as export hit, endangered good, and tourist magnet

The fashionistas documented by Aoki and his team would go on to play a surprising role: In 2001, the photographer put together a coffee-table book for the English publisher Phaidon to make the phenomenon of these Harajuku street styles known worldwide. This heralded a new phase in the interaction between the fashion district and the world abroad, as international audiences embraced both the book and its follow-up volume, as well as a related photo exhibition.

During this period, Harajuku reached a new level of internationalization: it became the symbolic stand-in for Japanese fashion worldwide. While attention from fashion abroad had been rare and very scene-specific, the colorful looks of the *FRUITS* photos now attracted widespread attention. Japan was no longer just a skilled style importer: No Doubt frontwoman Gwen Stefani released *Love Angel Music Baby* in 2004, an album that included songs like *Harajuku Girls* and was presented live with the help of four Japanese American backup dancers also referred to as 'Harajuku Girls'. Music videos for the album as well as the album's design also cite elements of street fashion from Harajuku. Stefani's Harajuku Lovers fashion line and perfumes brought the district further into the public eye. However, the public did not only react positively, but also criticized Stefani's open exoticization of Japanese street fashion - "[...] she's swallowed a subversive youth culture in Japan and barfed up another image of submissive giggling Asian women." (Anh, 2005, n/p).

Japan noticed the attention Harajuku's creative fashion received worldwide. In 2009, the government appointed three 'kawaii ambassadors' as part of the *Cool Japan* campaign, even though Harajuku trends had moved on and the neon-colored looks of the 1990s had become niche by then. For one year, the ambassadors

were to act as 'Trend Communicator[s] of Japanese Pop Culture in the Field of Fashion', advertising the fashion styles they represented abroad (MOFA, 2009). In my interview, Aoki called attention to this anachronistic disparity between the perception and reality of Harajuku street fashion (Interview by author, 13 October 2017). It is another clue to the ongoing simultaneous internationalization and exoticization of Japanese fashion abroad.

The designer Sebastian Masuda, whose 6% DOKIDOKI label emerged during the *FRUITS* boom, used the newfound global popularity. The Harajuku-based production company Asobisystem booked him as art director for Kyary Pamyu Pamyu's viral megahits *PONPONPON* (2011) and *Fashion Monster* (2012). Through these successes, as well as numerous convention visits, he realized the potential this colorful 'signature look' could have for the rapidly growing tourism market. Together with event restaurant operator Diamond Dining, he opened Kawaii Monster Café in 2015 on Meiji-dōri, a colorful fantasy world in which the 'iconic Harajuku girls called Monster Girls' put on a show in their street fashion-inspired costumes (Kawaii Monster Café, Internet) - a prime example of the (self-)exoticization of Japanese fashion at this time.

The café, which closed down in January 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, offered substitutes for the crazy outfits and colorful looks that guidebooks continue to promise foreign visitors, even though they have in reality mostly disappeared from the streets. Low-priced, multinational companies such as H&M and Zara are now present in Harajuku and tie the district directly to the fast fashion pulse with their globally identical collections. They are gradually squeezing out local competitors who can no longer afford the rising rents. At the same time, the exoticized, abbreviated distorted image of crazy Japanese fashion, with Harajuku as a synecdoche for it, persists in the minds of foreign visitors.

Beyond this narrow, exoticizing perception of Harajuku as a mecca of neon-color styles, the creatives working there are now increasingly perceived worldwide, so internationalization on a professional level seems to be continuing. Major changes in the international fashion business in the wake of fast fashion, the influence of the Internet, and an ever-increasing role of the street fashion sector also meant that Japanese expertise is in greater demand than ever before: Marx describes the return to traditional looks of American Ivy League fashion of the 1960s as an example from men's fashion. Knowledgeably documented and reinterpreted in Japan, they are now finding buyers again worldwide (Marx, 2015).

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In high fashion, Comme des Garçons, Yohji Yamamoto and Issey Miyake have maintained their positions since their Paris debuts in the 1980s and have also been able to introduce their protégés to this world. The streetwear sector has also created new paths: The Paris-based international luxury fashion house Kenzo for example has just appointed Nigo, who grew up in Harajuku's 1990s street fashion scene, as their new artistic director (WWD, 2021).

4. Conclusion

In my description of the development of fashion and lifestyle in postwar Harajuku, I have outlined the various phases of its historical constitution between self-perception and foreign perception, exoticization, and internationalization. In this, a gradual change can be seen, from a mere imitation of the lifestyle exemplified by international residents to a deeper understanding and the well-informed interpretation of these influences, to an expert, independent commentary on forms of fashion occurring worldwide. At the same time, both internationalizing and exoticizing tendencies exist in each of the stages of Harajuku's development. It is likely that this enduring, dynamic duality continues to have considerable influence on the perception and character of the neighborhood today. It cannot be described simply as an international neighborhood, nor is it a purely Japanese creation. It remains to be explored how this interplay has contributed to the development of a social free space in Harajuku that seemingly overrides the usual social norms and rules that regulate appearance and behavior elsewhere in Japan according to time, place, and purpose.

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