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WOMEN'S FASHION MAGAZINES IN JAPAN

Women vs. Women's Fashion Magazines in Relation to Self-image

Creation and Consumption

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Abstract

This study examines how Japanese women have been portrayed in women's fashion magazines and tests how women's fashion magazines have affected female readers' self-image creations and consumption behaviour. To this end, five copies magazines were selected for visual analysis to analyze the portrayals of Japanese women in the magazines from a gender perspective. In addition, interviews were conducted with female Japanese readers investigating the influence of the magazines on them. As media, the magazines provided an 'ideal female' image for their readers, and the magazines thus encouraged the readers to achieve this image by purchasing the advertised products. In doing so, the magazines could be 'instructions' for the female reader's self-image creations and consumption behaviour. The results of the visual analysis suggested that Japanese women in the magazines were still stereotypically depicted as submissive and *Kawaii* 'full-time housewives'. Nevertheless, this study concluded that the female readers themselves hold the power to decide whether to follow the magazines' instructions, and thus they determine how women's fashion magazines could affect their self-image creations and consumption behaviour.

Keywords: Women's fashion magazines-Japan, self-image creation, female consumption-Japan, stereotype representation

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Problems

Creighton (1997: 238) described Japan as a *jōhō shakai*, an “information” society, which is in some way reflected by the high turn-over in the magazines market. Women’s magazines — which, like a mini ‘women’s world, addressing all women issues ranging from fashion and beauty to male-female relations and even feminist messages of self-development and household management — have played a very important role in this market. There are hundreds of women’s magazines featuring the latest fashion trends published in Japan every month, and they post their advertisements at subway stations, in trains and on streets of popular commercial districts such as *Ginza* and *Shinjuku* in Tokyo on a grand scale. When opening up any of these so-called women’s fashion magazines which can be found at any magazines track in bookstores, convenience shops or subway stations in Tokyo, one can get two significant messages from these magazines. First, they are instructed about how to fashion their appearance (e.g. how to dress and how to do their makeup) and are shown images of an ‘ideal-female’. Second, they are confronted with a stupendous amount of information about commercial promotion (both many full-page(s) advertisements and soft advertisements in the text itself). As argued by Assmann (2003) more than 140 women’s magazines in Japan contain a very high percentage of advertisement. Thus, it seems that this kind of women’s fashion magazines attempt to teach female readers how to become an ‘ideal female’ by encouraging them to use the advertised products, and most of the products are international prestigious products, i.e. luxury products.

As media are said to be a mirror of the society (Branston and Stafford 1996a: 81), the representation of female by these women’s fashion magazines thus can be seen as Japanese female’s image and reflects the role of women in Japanese society. At the same time, the magazines also link their readers to consumers by promoting products in combination with an ‘ideal female’ image. Thus one would wonder whether the

‘ideal female’ image has successfully reached the female readers. And if so, how the readers have imitated the ‘ideal female’ image or changed their self-images to suit the expectations by means of purchasing the advertised products?

On the other hand, Japan is labeled as *shohi shakai*, a “consumer society” (Creighton 1997: 238), which is famous for being the largest luxury market of the world¹. According to a report from JETRO (Japan External Trade Organization)², a Japanese governmental-related organization (JETRO 2005), “Japanese consumers purchase 40 percent of the world's luxury goods every year. A 2002 survey found that 94 percent of Tokyo women in their 20's own a *Louis Vuitton* product; 92 percent own *Gucci*, 58 percent own *Prada*, 52 percent own *Chanel*, and 44 percent own *Christian Dior*.” Since women’s fashion magazines contain tens of full-page(s) advertisements about luxury brands, as well as some promotional information within their editing text, on the other hand, the magazines could very well have affected female behaviour in consumption. Thus have the magazines also contributed to female consumption in luxury³? In particular, some “High-mode” magazines (i.e. high-class fashion magazines), such as *Spur* and *Ginza*, are professional in their approach to providing information about luxury brands, like *Louis Vuitton* and *Gucci*. Thus it suggests there may be some kind of relationship between women’s fashion magazines and female consumption in luxury products.

1.2 Purpose and Research Questions

According to the issues raised above regarding the representation of the ‘ideal female’ image and promotion of female consumption by Japanese women’s magazines, in this study, I intend to examine the portrayals of Japanese women in women’s fashion magazines, as well as the influence of women’s fashion magazines on female

¹ Following Japan which has 41% share of the global luxury market, are US: 17%, European countries: 16% and China: 13%. Sources: Ernst & Young. 2005. “China: The New Lap of Luxury”. *Global Retail and Consumer Products*, China: Ernst and Young

² <http://www.jetro.go.jp/en/market/attract/retail/luxury.html>

³ It’s hard to give ‘luxury’ an exact definition, as its meaning would be varied through people depending on how rich he/she is. Thus, luxury brands in this study refer to world prestigious brands, in accordance with Kogler’s (2006) study on luxury consumption in Japan. And this study also only focuses on those luxury products advertised in women’s fashion magazines, such as cosmetic, accessories.

self-image creation and consumption behaviour. With this end in view, my research questions are formulated as follows:

1. How have Japanese women been portrayed in women's fashion magazines?
2. How did female readers follow the images conveyed in the magazines? How have the female readers' self-images been affected by the magazines?
3. How has women's consumption behaviour been affected by women's fashion magazines? Is there any relationship between fashion magazines and women's consumption in luxury products?

1.3 Theoretical Framework and Disposition

In order to resolve my research questions, I applied gender theory combined with media theory with the help of visual analysis of the magazines and interviews of Japanese magazines' readers. This is because, firstly, women's magazine has been termed as a 'women's world' and many scholars (e.g. Taylor and Lee 1994; Schlenker, Caron and Halteman 1998; Maynard and Taylor 1999; Lindner 2004; Grant and Millard 2006; Frith, Shaw and Cheng 2005; Frith 2006) have used them to study gender roles. The female images portrayed in the magazines are related to construction of the female gender. Secondly, from a media perspective, according to the media representation theory described by Branston and Stafford (1996) and Gauntlett (2002), women's fashion magazines, as media genre, are powerful in represent and transmit the 'ideal female' images to their female readers and then may affect their behaviors in self-images creation and consumption. In the beginning of the study, I will introduce women's fashion magazines in the Japanese context and examine their styles and their roles for Japanese women. And the analysis part of this thesis mainly consists of two parts: in the first part (section 4), I will employ gender theory and conduct a visual analysis to test the gender construction of Japanese female roles and female images portrayed in the fashion magazines. In the second part (section 5), I will explain how the magazines lead readers to become consumers by affecting their self-images creation through media theory, and I will test this hypothesis by review of my interview results.

2. Methodology

2.1 Design of the Study

This study is a qualitative study combined with quantitative visual analysis. As the purpose of the study is to see how women have been portrayed in women's fashion magazines and how women's consumption behaviour has been affected by women's fashion magazines, I collected some samples of the magazines to do content analysis. Yet, due to language limitations, the content analysis just focused on the visual text of the magazines. The method of visual analysis (which will be addressed in details in section 3.1) relies on the quantitative method, which is popularly used for content analysis. On the other hand, in order to learn how Japanese women really responded to the magazines, I conducted interviews of both Japanese female readers and an informant in the Japanese magazines industry.

2.2 Data Collection and Selections

The source of my data comes from three perspectives: interviews, fashion magazines I have collected in Japan, and personal observation on the streets and in bookstores in Tokyo.

2.2.1 Interviews

Interviewees of this study include one informant who was insider of women's magazine industry, and respondents who are readers of women's fashion magazines. The informant I met is the chief editor of a fashion magazine, and the interview questions are mainly designed to assess the relationship between women's fashion magazines and product brands.

On the other hand, I have two age groups of respondents, one is aged 18-22 years old and the other group is aged 22-40 years old⁴. The reason why I did these two age segments is because different age group could have different consumption patterns,

⁴ The reason why 22 years old is the boundary probably is because 22 years old is common graduating age in Japan.

since they enjoy different income levels and different life styles. Besides, Japanese magazine market also adopted this age segmentation to classify the magazines. Totally, I interviewed four unmarried employed female, one housewife, and five undergraduate students of Waseda University—a total of ten women—in my study. All of them bought at least one women’s fashion magazine every month. And the interview questions focused on their purpose for reading fashion magazines, and their experience about how their consumption behaviour has or has not been affected by reading women’s fashion magazines.

2.2.2 The magazines

The classification of Japanese women’s fashion magazines made by *Matsutani Souichiro* (see Figure 1 below) has been employed in the selection of magazines (see Figure 1 below). According to different age groups of readers, Matsutani (2004: 55) has classified women’s fashion magazines in Japan into four various categories by analyzing the surface of clothes and lifestyle representations, i.e. Conservative style, Loose casual style, The Gal style and Career style. The figures indicate that the conservative style tends to be the dominant style of women’s fashion magazines in Japan, as it has the largest number of magazines and enjoys readership of the widest age range. Hence, I choose to focus on the conservative style magazines in this study.

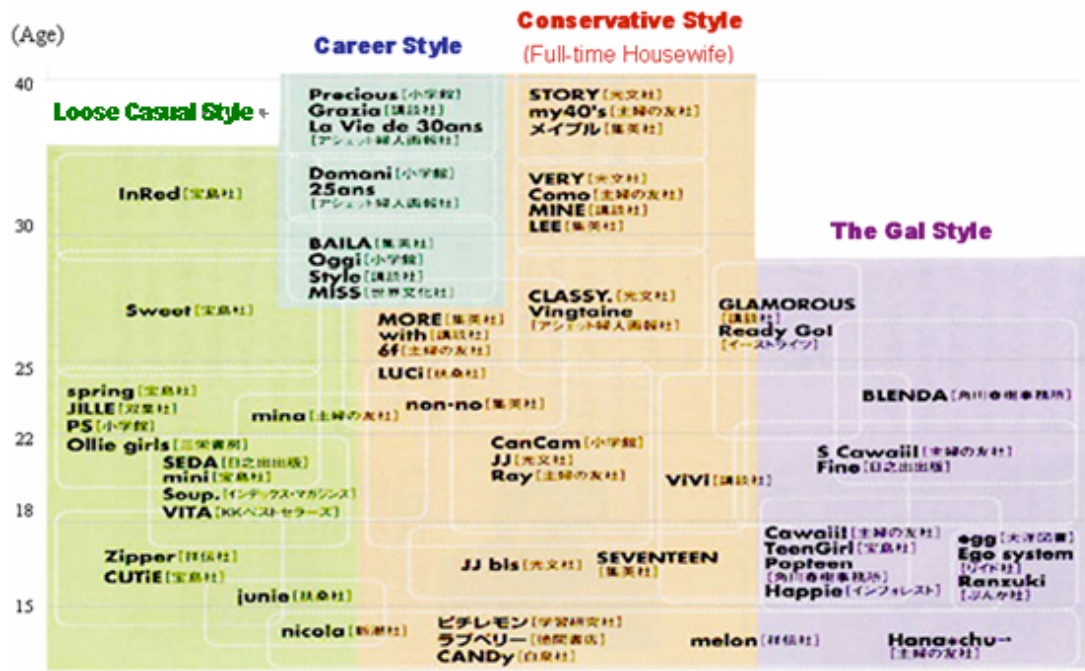
In addition, the magazine samples chosen are the best-selling magazines according to the circulation statistics from JMPA (Japan Magazines Publishing Association) (see Appendix I). This statistic recorded the circulation numbers for 436 magazines in Japan every month with the magazines’ printing proofs. In total, five copies of fashion magazines were selected as my data, all of them being August 2007 issues. They are *CanCam* magazine, whose targeted readers are aged 18-22, and *With* and *More* magazines,⁵ whose readers aged 22-40. Besides, I selected another two “High Mode” magazines, *Ginza* and *Spur*, whose readers range around 22-45 years old, and these

⁵ *With* and *More* make little differences in the circulation numbers (590,000 and 597,500 respectively), and both of them were very popular for my interviewees, so I selected both of them into my study.

two magazines specialize in luxury consumption.

Figure 1 Matrix of Women's Fashion Magazine in Japan: Styles and Age Segmentations

Source: Matsutani S., 2004.



2.2.3 Other data

Additionally, to complement my primary data, I took pictures of advertisements and posters about women's fashion magazines in Tokyo, Japan.

3. Women's fashion magazines in Japan: Diversity and Roles for Women

3.1. Diversify Women's Fashion Magazines in Japan

It is hard to find a richer source for the gender study of Japanese women than women's magazines. The so-called women's magazines, addressing a wide range of issues all about women and released through month by month and year by year,

make up an amazing documentary track of Japanese women's history. To explore the transformation of Japanese women's image in modern society, it is worthwhile to go deeper into the history of the development of women's fashion magazine and its diversities in Japan.

3.1.1 Conservative style to full-time housewife

As mentioned above, women's fashion magazines have been mainly classified into four sorts. Conservative style is the initial sort in the history of women's fashion magazines, and it reveals the traditional role of Japanese women as full-time housewife (Matsutani 2004). These magazines are not only targeted at housewives, but for all women in different ages, from teenage girls, college students, married women, to women in their late 40s. The typical female image projected by this style is long, wavy hair, in skirt with chiffon and with a tender smile. The 'conservative' women have always been seen as a '*kawaii* [cute] girlfriend', a 'good housewife', and a 'wise mother' in these magazines.

3.1.2 Career Style: new role for Japanese women

With the enforcement of the "Law of Equal Employment for Men and Women" in 1986 and social depression resulting from the burst of the economic bubble, Japanese women's values became diversified. Their social images began to change in this period, and women's fashion magazines became variegated, and soon after new styles magazines such as Career style, Loose casual style and The Gal style yield. The birth of career style magazine can be seen as a symbol of improvement in social position for Japanese women (Matsutani 2004). Contrary to conservative style magazines which stress the women's role in the family, career style magazines pay attention to women's career life. It addresses issues that working women would be concerned about, such as how to make women's image more professional, how to handle problems at the office, and how to promote their career.

3.1.3 Loose casual style: street fashion in Harajuku⁶

Loose casual style⁷ originated from the street fashion in the *Harajuku* District of Tokyo. Readers of this style magazine are those who desire to express their own identity in dressing. The images portrayed to fit their taste are thus not the orthodox images seen from conservative magazines, but loose casual style magazines seek to represent individuality (Matsutani 2004). The dressing characteristics of this style are more street, natural, and (or) casual.

3.1.4 The Gal style: Ganguro girls in Shibuya

The Gal style is an original Japanese fashion style with lots of different subdivisions, such as *Kogal* and *Ganguro*. Although there are some differences among the subdivisions, they are similar in their anti-conventional taste of feminine beauty. *Ganguro* girls in *Shibuya*, Tokyo are representatives of the Gal style. These girls are known for having tanned skin, dyed hair color, very showy make-up, especially applying huge amount of eye make-up, and wearing mini skirt. Though conservative magazines are more popular, the Gal style magazines also lead a big fashion trend in Japan.

3.1.5 “High mode” magazines

High mode magazines, as the name suggests, unlike the other four lifestyle magazines mentioned above which focus on middle class people. This is a category of magazines that showcases products related to high-end fashion (mainly refers to expensive prestigious products). The main readers of this kind of magazines are those involved in the fashion industry. Although most of the products displayed in the magazines are not affordable by ordinary people, but it is argued that they give readers a source of inspiration and information and in turn readers may be able to purchase cheaper similar substitute products instead (Assmann 2003). In addition, because this kind of magazines stands for high-class consumption, reflecting a high-quality lifestyle, the

⁶ *Harajuku* is the area around *Harajuku* Station in the *Shibuya* ward of Tokyo, Japan. And it is well-known for its youth style and street fashion.

⁷ Loose casual style also called *Urahara*-style in the past. *Urahara* refers to “Ura-Harajuku” which means alley of *Harajuku*.

Figure2 Conservative Style Magazine (From *CanCam* August 2007)



Figure3 Career Style Magazine (From *Precious* December 2007)



Figure 4 Loose Casual Style Magazine (From *Spring* September 2007)



Figure5 The Gal Style Magazine (From *Egg* October 2007)



Figure6. “High Mode” Magazine (From *Ginza* August 2007)



magazines use Western models instead of Japanese models, because in Japanese thinking, Western people are perceived as having a more exquisite and luxurious lifestyle

3.2 Roles Played by Women’s Fashion Magazines for Women

Drummond (2004: 168) argued that women’s magazines create a ‘women’s world’ for women in which women’s role and lifestyles are ‘guided’. So for Japanese female readers, what roles do women’s fashion magazines play and what are women’s purposes for reading the magazines?

3.2.1 Consumption guide

Month by month, women’s fashion magazines do their devoir on reporting the latest fashion trend, by outfitting models with clothes, accessories or make-ups in the latest vogue. So the latest fashion trend is the primary information that female readers would get from reading the magazines. Almost all my interviewees have indicated

that their main purpose of reading the fashion magazines is to check out the latest fashion information.

On the other hand, the latest fashion trends always represent prospective consumption trends in fashion. Once female readers get information about the latest fashion, this knowledge could link to their consumption behaviour. Furthermore, all products appeared in the magazines were annotated with detailed information, such as the brand, the price, alternative colors, and also index to the addresses and telephone numbers of the stores. Thus reading these fashion magazines can be directly linked to the readers' consumption behaviour. A 29 year-old employed woman answered that "I check the latest fashion news on magazines to find out something nice or probably suitable for me and then go to store to buy it." Assmann (2003) therefore suggested that women's magazines play an influential role in Japanese consumer behaviour, and the magazines could be seen as a mere selling 'tools', which provide useful information about the latest trends in consumption.

3.2.2 Beauty Textbook

If checking the latest fashion trends is the primary purpose for women to read the fashion magazines, then secondly they treat the fashion magazines as textbooks for becoming 'beautiful'. Fashion magazines never fail to live up to readers' expectations, and readers can always find all kinds of information about how to pretty themselves up. Apart from displaying the most popular clothing, fashion magazines teach readers how to dress and how to make up on different occasions, or how to look different by changing combinations of the same clothes. The fashion magazines would provide step-by-step instructions of how to make up, how to take good care of one's skin, how to arrange one's hair, and all other kinds of dress-up methods to make one look desirable. This is how one of the interviewees described it:

For me, the fashion magazines like books teach me how to become pretty. /.../ I

learned how to make up and how to match the clothes through magazines...I believe the fashion magazines had influence on my aesthetics and my taste.

(Miss K, a 21 year-old undergraduate student)

In this sense, female readers have learned how to move closer to the so-called 'ideal female' image by following the fashion magazines' instructions.

3.2.3 Model Idols

During my interviews in Japan, I kept hearing a model's name, called *Yuri Ebihara*, who is a model of *CanCam* magazine, and has been lovingly called '*Ebichan*'. There was a so-called '*Ebichan* phenomenon' in Japan, which refers to the incredible sales of magazines and clothes *Ebichan* has sparked. As *Mainichi Daily News* (August 17, 2008) reported, there were hundreds of women who bought *CanCam* every month to see what *Ebichan* was wearing in the monthly and then promptly went out to buy the complete kit. Connell (2007) argued *Ebichan's* effect on young Japanese women is hard to estimate.

I like reading CanCam because my favorite model is *Ebichan*. She is very cute and popular now!

(Miss Y, a 19-year-old undergraduate student)

Similarly, a few other interviewees also gave similar examples of how certain models attract them to read the magazines.

I also like seeing the models on magazines; they are beautiful, slinky, tall and very pretty. Thought I can't be tall or pretty as them, I like seeing them.

(A 29-year-old employed woman, unmarried)

Actually, I didn't plan to buy this fashion magazine [*More* magazine] last month, but the cover girl was my favorite model, so I changed my mind at last and bought it.

(A 24-year-old master's student, unmarried)

3.2. 4 Life Pleasure

Besides the purposes discussed above, female readers also aim to seek 'life pleasure' via reading the fashion magazines. Some claimed that reading the fashion magazines are part of their life as a habit, and they enjoy the reading like hobbies.

[For other reasons,] I just like reading women's fashion magazines without any special reasons, it's kind of leisure or habit for me in spare time.

(A 29-year-old employed woman, unmarried)

Reading women's fashion magazine is a way for me to relax myself and I enjoy it.

(Miss E, 19 year-old undergraduate student)

At the same time, the fashion magazines played dual roles in women's life. On the one hand, the magazines themselves are a commodity for readers to seek for pleasure in their spare time; on the other hand, it is also a manual teaching women how to build a pleasurable lifestyle.

I read the fashion magazines because I am interested in the information about traveling, art, health issues, and some new life concepts they proposed.

(A 27-year-old employed female, unmarried)

In conclusion, given their involvement with wide-ranging aspects of women's lives, including female consumption decisions, self-image and lifestyle creation, women's fashion magazines can indeed be seen as a mini 'women's world'.

4. Japanese Women Portrayed in Women's Fashion magazines

4.1 Women's Fashion Magazine: a Gendered Text

In prior research, women's fashion magazines have been treated as gendered text and widely used for research on gender roles. Women's magazines are a mirror to reflect what role women play in society, but they also serve as a vehicle to transmit the culturally and socially constructed definition of what is female. Schlenker, Caron and Halteman (1998) have analyzed the content of *Seventeenth* Magazines from 1945 to 1995, and they found that the heart of this women's magazines was the articles that showed the traditional roles of women with emphasis on appearance, male-female relationships, and household issues, though feminist messages such as self-development, career, political or world issues exhibited little affirmative changes throughout decades. Many scholars in this field drew attention to the advertisements appearing in women's magazines, as they believe advertisements embody the "visual representation of traditional gender stereotype" for both male (seen as authoritative and competent) and female (seen as submissive and dependent) (Millard and Grant 2006: 660). Much scholarly work thus has examined the products, the race of models, or the pose of models accompanying the advertisements to repeat the stereotyped portrayals of women in advertisements (e.g. Taylor and Lee 1994; Maynard and Taylor 1999; Lindner 2004; Frith, Shaw and Cheng 2005; Grant and Millard 2006; Frith 2006).

Furthermore, several studies have noticed the influence of culture on the images of beauty. Differences that may exist in the portrayal of female models in cross-culture context have been investigated through content analysis of advertisements (Maynard and Taylor 1999; Frith, Shaw and Cheng 2005; Frith 2006). For example, Maynard and Taylor (1999) suggested in their beauty comparative studies that the images of young girls in a Japanese version of *Seventeenth* Magazine were posed as "Cute/Next-door" girls who are smiling or giggling, and looking more submissive, while American girls shown on the US version of *Seventeenth* Magazine look more

independent and defiant. Similarly, Frith contrasted the East and the West in advertising and found that beauty in the U.S. may be constructed more in terms of a sexy body while Asian beauty is more related to a pretty face (Frith, Shaw and Cheng 2005; Frith 2006). All in all, these researchers have demonstrated the stereotypic portrayals of women in women's fashion magazines. Women always play a submissive role or as a sex object, although the desirable beauty types in magazines (referring to the physical characteristics perceived as beautiful) are varied across cultures.

However, most of the research mentioned above just focus on the analysis of advertisements and magazine covers, but ignored the editing fashion shoots which contain 'fashion and beauty' materials taking up most pages of a fashion magazine and accompanied by articles on new fashion trends. Different from advertisement pictures aiming to sell a specific product, the editing fashion shoots are used for displaying styles of clothing, accessories or makeup that are considered as latest trends. Millard and Grant (2006: 660) thus suggested that these photos about fashion trends would affect women more, as female readers tend to imitate or copy the dressing styles in order to avoid being out of fashion. Therefore, this study scrutinized how women have been depicted in photos from advertisements, as well as from fashion shoots in the magazines. To answer my research question, I sought to investigate from the following perspectives:

1. What kind of roles for Japanese women are portrayed in these fashion magazines?
2. What beauty images do the magazines transmit to their female readers?

4.2 Methodology of Visual Analysis

To answer the above questions, I conducted a visual analysis of full-page photos from advertisements and fashion shoots carried in the best-selling magazines *CanCam*, *With*, *More*, *Spur* and *Ginza* by comparing the portrayals of stereotypical images of Japanese models and Western models. The unit of analysis was restricted to the photos where the focal model is an adult woman. If there were more than one model

in the photo, the most dominant and the biggest size model was coded, otherwise, more models were coded separately as long as they are in the same position and the same size in the photo. In order to explore the stereotypical images, the stereotype checklist, which is based on the classic work by Goffman (1979) and used by Millard and Grant (2006) in their study has been employed here to rate the model's pose. This stereotype checklist measures the scales of two stereotypical definitions for women—submissiveness and explicit sexuality, by using four coding categories (1) Licensed withdrawal, (2) Ritualization of subordination, (3) feminine touch and (4) body display. Concretely, Licensed withdrawal (referring to women who tend to withdraw themselves from the situation at hand through involvements, e.g. covering face with hand) and Ritualization of subordination (refers to physically lower position, e.g. sitting on a chair) are indicators for judging the degree of submissiveness, and feminine touch (e.g. touching self) and body display (e.g. nudity) contribute to symbolizations of explicit sexuality. The descriptions of visual cues for different categories and coding scheme are listed in table 1.

At the same time, using the stereotype checklist below, I scored every model's pose according to the code scheme and then calculated the average scores of them indexed to each category. These stereotype scores were then used for comparing the degree of submissiveness and explicit sexuality between Japanese models and Western models. In doing so, Japanese models could receive Western models as a reference standard and it would be clearer and easier to see how gender roles portrayed for Japanese women by comparing with Western women.

4.3 Results

4.3.1 The frequencies of occurrence of stereotypes

In total, 353 photographs (109 photographs from advertisements and 244 from fashion shoots) were selected, and the final number of poses rated are equal to 390 (238 Japanese models and 152 Western models). I calculated the frequencies of occurrence for each category on the stereotype checklist; in doing so, we know what are the most

common ways women usually have been portrayed in these magazine samples. For submissiveness (licensed withdrawal and Ritualization of subordination), which refers

Table1 Gender Role Stereotypes: Categories, Variables, and Coding Scheme

Source: Millard,J.E. and P. R. Grant, 2006.

Categories	Variables		Coding Scheme
	Score	Visual cues	
Licensed withdrawal	1	smile	No = 0 Yes = 1, 2 or 3 (range 0-3)
	2	head/eye aversion, withdrawal from scene at large (mentally going “away” from the scene)	
	3	covering mouth or face with hand or object	
Ritualization of subordination	1	not holding the body erect and the head upright	No = 0, Yes = 1, 2, 3 or 4 (range 0-4)
	2	body or head slant	
	3	reclining /sitting on some surface (e.g. bed/floor)	
	4	“bashful knee bend”, crawling or lying on front	
Feminine touch	1	to trace the outline of an object, cradling and/or caressing object with hands or fingers	No = 0, Yes = 1 or 2 (range 0-2)
	2	touching self (e.g., hair, face, lips)	
Body display	1	dressing revealing clothing	No = 0 Yes = 1 or 2 (range 0-2)
	2	body exposure, nudity	

to putting oneself physically or psychologically to a lower position in relation to the other, it is not surprising this submissive images for women are still dominant. This can be demonstrated by the following numbers: (1) At least one visual cue referring to licensed withdrawal was found at 90.76% for Japanese models, and 62.5% for Western models; (2) as for the frequency of visual cue(s) appearing as Ritualization of subordination, both Japanese models and western models enjoy very high proportion, 98% for Japanese models and 96.71% for Western models. More specifically, in the ways of licensed withdrawal, 133 out of 238 Japanese models (55.88%) showed a smile or giggle, 26.74% models showed withdrawal to the viewers, and only 12 Japanese models covered face/mouth. In contrast, there were only 8.55% Western models who smiled in the photos, most of them exhibited head/eye aversion or withdrawal gazing to the viewers (39.47%), and 14.47% of them covered their face/mouth by fingers or object. On the other hand, the results of examining the other four visual cues used for Ritualization of subordination measure indicated that 39.50% of Japanese models lean their head or body, which is nearly twice what Western models did (21.71%). Yet, 26.47% Japanese models sat or reclined on some surface, less than the amount received by Western models at 32.24%, and it is interesting that this rate, i.e. 32.24%, is also the result of frequency for not standing in an erect posture by Western models, while Japanese models got 21.43% in this visual cue counting. At the same time, neither of Japanese models and Western models has been found less occurrence in bending their knees or lying on front (10.92% and 10.52% respectively).

For the examination of frequencies of explicit sexual behaviour displayed in the samples, 79.83% of Japanese models contained the visual cues of feminine touch, which is slightly higher than 75% for Western models. In addition, 56.72% for Japanese models and 40.79% for Western models implicated visual cue(s) index to body display. More specifically, the rate of Japanese models for caressing an object is

46.22%, and 33.61% for touching self; while what Western models obtained are 36.84% for caressed an object and 38.16% of them touching self. It seems that Japanese models preferred to caress something, but Western models tended to touch themselves a little bit more. Furthermore, both Japanese models and Western models dressed in a revealing way to display their bodies, with 56.3% and 40.13% frequencies for each, and only two ads (one using Japanese model and the other using western model) displayed a nude female body (covering breasts).

4.3.2 The degree of stereotypical performance

Table 2 below is the final stereotype scores for Japanese models and Western models. There are no big differences between Japanese models and Western models in the stereotypical images of women, except the results of “body display”, which conflict with what Frith (2006: 158) has argued, namely, that Western models are presented in a more explicit sexual manner than Asians in Asian women’s magazines. But this gap for “body display” could be expected, as August issues of conservative magazines (using Japanese models) targeted at summer styling, while August issues of “High Mode” magazines (using Western models) addressed the latest fashion trends for autumn, so there is no doubt that Japanese models expose their body more in editing fashion shoots within the samples. Therefore, I calculated the scores of model poses only in advertisements to erase the effects of seasonal editing bias on fashion shoots, and the results came out as 0.64 for Japanese models, and 0.69 for Western models.

Table2 Results of Stereotype Scores: Gender role stereotypes mean by race

Categories	Race of model	
	Japanese model	Western model
Licensed withdrawal	1.32	1.31
Ritualization of subordination	2.24	2.22
Feminine Touch	1.13	1.13
Body Display	0.58	0.43

The higher score means more licensed withdrawal (range 0 to 3), more ritualized subordination (range 0 to 4), more feminine touch (range 0 to 2), and more body display (range 0 to 2).

By this measurement, the degree of body display for Japanese models is slightly lower than how Western models are exhibited in advertisements. Thus, if there were no seasonal editing bias in fashion shoots, Western models would have displayed more sexually explicit poses than Japanese models. In conclusion, according to the visual analysis, the typical female stereotypes are still very popular for both Japanese and Western women in Japanese fashion magazines. Essentially, Japanese models are portrayed as more submissive and less sexually explicit than Western models.

4.4 Discussions

4.4.1 Women's role as full-time housewives

In gender studies, gender is different from sex (refers to biological differences for male and female), but rather could be theorized as “social elaboration of sex” (McDowell 1999: 14), which means gender is made by human interpretations, and these interpretations come from the social understandings of masculinity and femininity. Like philosopher Simone de Beauvoir said: “One is not born a woman, one becomes one” (ibid: 13). On the other hand, for social constructions of ‘how a woman should look like’ and ‘how a woman should behave’ base on local values of culture, ethnicity, class and hierarchies, thus the social understandings of what it is to be a woman and what is it to be a man would vary through time and space, in accordance with society transformation and geographic diversity. Thus the social constructed definition of women would be different in Japanese society and western world, due to the different local understandings of femininity. Therefore, in women’s fashion magazines, the roles of Japanese models and western models and their beauty types have been depicted in different ways. The magazines portray Japanese models by Japanese understandings of what and how being a woman, and these Japanese models in women’s fashion magazines are no doubt being the exemplar of social-constructed ‘ideal female’ that female readers are encouraged to follow.

It is readily seen that the reason why Japanese models have been portrayed more submissive than western models are resulted from the Japanese social constructions of a woman — her role in society and her desirable image (both appearance and behaviour). In Japan, although women's positions have reaped development with the process of globalization and modernization, Japanese women are still constructed as subordinated to men. This could be demonstrated by the imbalanced roles play for male and female at work and at home. Dasgupta (2000: 192) described a picture of a typical Japanese family like husband play as 'corporate soldiers' to public work to earn money to support the family, and wife turn to private household play as 'good wives' and 'wise mothers' to take care of every family members. As the traditional role of a Japanese woman is as dedicated 'housewife', so women have been treated should stay at home as 'housekeeper' and men go out to work as 'breadwinner'. Under this society model, once a woman gets married, she would stay at home and completely depend on her husband. All in all, there are two evidences which could prove the subordinate status of women to men. Firstly, Japanese women are hard to get the same treatment (e.g. salary, opportunities of promotion) as men obtained at work. Secondly, Japanese women have to be responsible for almost all housework at home.

To fit the social construction of female, the women's magazines taught women how to become an 'ideal female' by using traditional full-time housewife as prototype. For a fulltime housewife, in order to let her family have a better-off life, it is important for her to let her husband can thrive himself on work to support family without fear of trouble in the rear from home, so housewife thus supposed to be meek and submissive to husband. It is hard to imagine a woman (full-time housewife) could be contrarious to her husband and incapable of harmonious association at home, as long as both she and her family depend on her husband. So, in this sense, a meek and sweet woman would be more desirable. Thus, Japanese models portrayed in the magazines performed a high degree of submissiveness. Furthermore, it is interesting that I can see almost every Japanese model smiled on every page when I turned over the fashion

magazines. As far as I calculated in the samples, the percentage of models who smiled in the photos reached 95.88% (including those models who were withdrawn from the scene with smile); by contrast, very few western models gave smiles, they tended to aversion eye/head, or withdrawal gazing with glassed-eye or even defiant. It is apparent that smile is the one of the most conspicuous characteristic for Japanese women, and formation of this distinct characteristic for Japanese women could also thanks to the subordinated role of female in Japanese society, as Goffman (1979:48) indicated that smiles can be a signal that “nothing agonistic is intended or invited, that the meaning of other’s act has been understood and found acceptable, that, indeed, the other is approved and appreciated”, thus smiles “seem more the offering of an inferior than a superior”

4.4.2 Beauty images depicted in the magazines: *kawaii* cuties

In the samples of fashion magazines, the looking of Japanese models are similar, they usually wear pastel colors and sugary detailing clothing, wavy long hair, slant head with smile, and perform in a sweet, shy, and/or delicate ways. This is typical representation of *Kawaii* which is a special word in Japanese meaning cute.

Kawaii or ‘cute’ essentially means childlike; it celebrates sweet, adorable, innocent, pure, simple, genuine, gentle, vulnerable, weak, and inexperienced social behaviour and physical appearances. It has been well described as a style which is ‘infantile and delicate at the same time as being pretty’ (Kinsella 1995:220).

Different from western models are portrayed as sophisticated, mature and displaying a more erect standing body, and boldly eye contact with the beholder, in which of the ways western women are treated more independent. The images of Japanese women can be found in women’s fashion magazines are like *kawaii* next-door girls. As Kinsella (1995: 221-222) explained, *kawaii* is a derivation of a term whose primary signification was “shy” or “embarrassed”, and then secondary meanings were “pathetic”, “weak”, “lovable” or “small”, thus to present female in *kawaii* styling is

apparently to expect to receive the corresponding treatment as the sheltered, dependent, subordinated positions. At the same time, idolizing the childlike guise as beauty image, Japanese women refuse maturity which is symbolic label of authority and individual rights, but represent themselves as still not mature enough to carry out some social responsibilities (ibid: 243). Thus, *Kawaii* images going extremely prevalent over Japanese women can be argued as to respond to women's subordinated role. However, according to observations during my stay in Japan, it's worthy to note that Japanese themselves always directly translated *Kawaii* into 'pretty' or 'beautiful', and they always use *Kawaii* instead of other words to express 'pretty' or 'beautiful'. Therefore, *Kawaii*, in the Japanese context, is not only a meaning of 'cute', but is the name of 'beauty' virtually.

Figure 9 Billboard of *Vivi* magazine, Catchphrase: "Everyday, Sweet and Sexy!"
(Taken at subway station of Ginza, Tokyo, Japan, in July 2007)



On the other hand, although sexy body always have been treated as a label applying to western women, it is worthy to note the sexy image for Japanese women was emerging in the women's fashion magazines. As the results of visual analysis in this study pointed out, the frequencies and degrees of "body display" and "feminine touch" of Japanese models in the samples are not that lower, some even higher than that of western model. Being sexy would be another popular image for Japanese women, just like the desirable image loaded by *Vivi* magazine to their readers: "sweet and sexy" (see Figure 9). Yet, this sexy image of Japanese women is softer than that for western women, and still mixed with the Japanese cute preference.

5. Leading Readers to Consumers

5.1 Representation of Female in the Magazines

5.1.1 Stereotype representation of the magazines

In last section, I have already analyzed how Japanese women have been portrayed by the fashion magazines and attested the stereotypic images of Japanese women. It always argued that stereotypes are unavoidable in mass media representation, so it has been part of key debates in media studies (Branston and Stafford 1996b: 90-91). Branston and Stafford (ibid) have defined stereotypes as "widely circulated ideas or assumptions about particular group" (in this study, it refers to the widely circulated assumptions for female). In this sense, we all belong to a particular group whose characters (e.g. appearance or behaviour) have been assumed beforehand. Given a simple example, we think the one dressed in skirt is a woman, and the one dressed in suit is a man. Thus, women as a gender group also have been prejudged as how they are said to look like. But everyone is a unique individual, so we claimed to break away the prejudice and expected to get other ways of thinking about women. That's probably why in the history of women's fashion magazines in Japan, there kept put forth new styles fashion magazines for women, such as Career style magazines and the Gal style magazines.

However, the stereotypes are not easy to change in the women's magazines, as well as by the women's magazines. On one hand, the magazines, carried rich social and cultural text, and their stereotypes representation are inspired by local cultural value (the cultural assumptions and attitudes towards women). Culture as an identity of a society sometime is inrooted in the society and couldn't collapse completely. On the other hand, for magazines, using stereotypes can quickly and easy to engender resonance in communicating readers, as there is no need to break the things already established first and then rebuild new things and wait for readers to accept them. Especially in the advertisements of the magazines, for readers perhaps only spend 3 or 4 seconds on each page, advertisers don't have time to develop new characters to impress their sales message, so they hired stereotypes to make it as 'normal' representation to audience, Frith (2006: 154) explained. Therefore, as this study pointed out above, when Japanese models escaped from the stereotypic images in the magazines to become sexy which usually have been thought as feature for western women, they still combined 'sexy' with Japanese typical 'cute' images. As (1996b: 91) argued that even the media changed the stereotypes, it is always in the ways combing typical and atypical elements together in which the stereotypes can be understood. Hence, although stereotypes have already existed at the society nowadays, it seems to be still reinforced in this way.

As media, women's fashion magazines in Japan are supposed to be the mirror of Japanese society, and given the true portrayals of Japanese women, but for the stereotypes representation always implicated that some typical characters of certain groups people have been magnified as characters for whole group, so we don't know how accurate the magazines would reflect the society and how realistic the Japanese women have been depicted in the magazines. Yet, as Brandston and Stafford (1996: 78) said, "the media give us images, ways of imaging particular groups which can have material effects on how those groups experience the world, and how they get understood or even legislated for by others." It may say, the media watch the world, and then we watch the media to watch the world. Thus, use the line of thoughts from

Gornick (1979: vi), what women's fashion magazines told us are more about how we think women behave and look like, rather than how women actually behave and look like.

5.1.2 Women's fashion magazines and women's self-image creation

As argued above, the women's magazines showed what think women to be look like and behave. Thus when women's fashion magazines have given women so many images, it is highly unnecessarily that the women's fashion magazines would have no influence on how women think about their own images. And this conjecture has been proved in Gauntlett's (2002b: 193-206) research and he argued women's magazines "suggest ways of thinking about the self, and propose certain kinds of lifestyle, which are then actively processed by the readers as they establish their personal biography, sense of identity and technologies of the self". Hereto, it is no doubt that the magazines gave readers a social-constructed and media-transmitted 'ideal female' image that readers compared against themselves, then they would rethink about their own images and thus reflect on their self-image creations.

Yet, due to the stereotype representation of the magazines, the 'ideal female' image could be a stereotypic one, thus the reader, as unique individuals, probably want to escape from the prejudiced image and keep on their own identities. So, the 'ideal female' image promoted by the magazines, could be copied, borrowed, or employed by readers on their self-image, but also could be critically overlooked by readers as well. Therefore whether the magazines win or the readers win still depend on the readers, is it true to Japanese readers? I will further address it later in the readers interviews review.

5.2 Marketing the Magazines

5.2.1 The fashion magazines, the advertising vehicles

As media, it is not strange that the presence of advertising has become a normal feature for women's magazines, but Burton (2005: 133) indicated that women's

magazines are exceptional with “the sheer volume of promotional material”. For the fashion magazines themselves, relevantly, they have been termed as the ‘advertising vehicle’. This is because the profits of releasing magazines eventually go to magazine publishers are not from selling magazines to readers, but rather yields from selling advertisements space to advertisers. In this sense, running fashion magazines for publisher is not making ‘textbook’ to teach what is ‘ideal female’, but rather means getting a vehicle which is capable of loading advertisements on it and in turns can gain from advertisers. Thus, the reasons why some fashion magazines, such as *ELLE*, *Marie Claire* and *Cosmopolitan*, have entered foreign markets would be plausible to generate more revenue through larger circulations, but rather to expand their advertisement space abroad thus can sell it to the international product brands who want to enter a newer and larger foreign markets (Frith 2006: 153). Consequently, as the fashion magazines heavily rely on the revenue from advertisements, the magazines editors can not afford to offend advertisers and intimately connected their editing contents to the advertising missions.

Hence, when revenue from magazine circulations can not cover the publishers cost, while the revenue obtained from advertisements turn to the most important revenue source, female readers are imperative to be defined as consumers by magazines publisher due to the advertising-oriented motivation. As Drummond argued that (2004: 173) “women’s magazines position women as consumers first and foremost, because the magazines are vehicles, pleasurable vehicles, for advertising”. In this way, female are in the roles turning from readers to consumers.

5.2.2 The relationship between the magazines and product brands

In order to examine the relationship between the magazines and product brands, I have conducted an interview with the chief editor of a fashion magazine in Japan. The result of interview indicated that there is a kind of mutually beneficial relationship between women’s fashion magazines and product brands. On one hand, the product brands launched a huge amount of advertisements on magazines every year, which

contributed to the most part of profit of the magazines. In doing so, luxury brand is kind of financial supporter to magazines. On the other hand, for return to the support of the product brands and maintain good relations between them, magazines would always make soft advertisements for these products in their editing parts of the magazines, or even do some special promotion of the products sometimes (e.g. using the most popular model explicitly display the new product of those brands in some full-page fashion shoots).

Of course, the big advertisers which the fashion magazines highly depending on are always those international prestigious brands — the so-call luxury brands, as only they are able to spend huge amount of money on advertisement every year. For instance, the biggest advertiser of the magazine I have visited was *Gucci* group, and then were brands like *D&G*, *Prada*, *Chanel* and *Dior*. The chief editor frankly disclosed that “these luxury brands have a certain degree of influence on the content of the magazine.” Because once the content of the magazine wasn’t satisfied by those brands, they would recall the advertisements put on magazines, which would be a huge loss for magazines. Obviously, the easiest way to keep the style of the magazine fit these luxury brands’ taste is to keep introducing the products of those luxury brands in the magazines.

The so-called fashion trend introduced by the fashion magazines thus seems to be a ‘fake’ and so fragile, because this trend may determined by how many advertisements the brands put on the magazines or how much they have paid the magazines. Yet, it would be plausible, as the makers of the fashion trend are not the editors of the fashion magazines, but are the first-ranked designers who work for those luxury brands. The editors and stylists of the magazines decide what would be popular in next season based on the newly fashion collection in each season of these prestigious brands. Therefore, women’s fashion magazines are just the ‘media’ tools that transmit and deliver the fashion information created by the product brands.

Thus, the fashion magazines, it stands in the middle of the product brands and readers. For the product brands, it is the ‘advertising vehicles’ and thus would be the products promoter. For the female readers, it affects their self-image creations and encourages them to be an ‘ideal female’ by purchasing and using the products advertised in the magazines. Thus, one would wonder how women’s behaviors in consumption have been affected by women’s fashion magazines, especially in the consumption of the luxury products. These questions will be discussed later by review of interviews to female readers in Japan.

5.3 What the Readers Say: the Influence of the Magazines on the Readers

5.3.1 Self-image formulation: pick up or put down

The interview questions about the readers’ self-images creation have been generally framed as questions like “How do you feel about the model’s images in the fashion magazines?”, “Did you imitate the model’s image before?”, “Whether the magazines helped you build your aesthetics and your own image?” My respondents showed the same impression to the so-called ‘ideal female’ image encouraged in magazines as *Kawaii*. And then they put some words like cute, pretty, nice skin, fair figure on models. Although all of them have admitted that the magazines helped them to build their own aesthetics (what think to be beautiful), but when I asked about whether they imitated or want to imitate the model’s image, they have given me a wide range answers.

As I have mentioned the ‘*Ebichan* phenomenon’ in the beginning. *Ebichan* has aroused hundreds of readers rushed to buy the clothes or other products she displayed. Those readers attempted to make themselves look like what *Ebichan* look like. ‘Models’ actually is the so-called ‘ideal female’ in the magazines, and they could have an unquantifiable influence on the readers’ self-image. A 36 years old woman who works as an administration officer told me about this:

[Her favorite model in the magazine] She is pretty, young, elegant, mature woman. I

want to become her style [image].

(A 36-year-old employed female, unmarried)

And also,

Yes, I imitated their [models] dressing style, and sometimes buy the same clothes they showed in the magazines ...I even tried to practice how I can smile so gorgeous like them.

(Miss A, a 19-year-old, undergraduate student)

But some people chose kind of 'pick up and mix with' way to create self-image through reading the magazines. They were critical on the model's images and only follow their loving image. As a 21 years old undergraduate student said "I usually integrate the model's image with my own style".

I like her [her favorite model] looking...but the clothes dressed by her are too expensive. And it's impossible for me to look like her, because I am not as tall as her. So I just copy her make-up or hair style sometimes.

(A 29-year-old employed female, single)

At the same time, the magazines didn't have that powerful influence on the readers sometimes. It can be easy to 'pick up' and also easy to 'put down' by readers.

If I read a magazine, I will follow its style, because I always select the magazine before I buy it. If I like its style, I buy it. But if the magazine's style doesn't fit me anymore, I will go to find out other magazines.

(A 28 years old housewife)

I used to read *Vivi*, but now I don't because it changed its style and I don't like it.

(Miss K, a 19-year-old undergraduate student)

And also the 27 years old employed female indicated that "I don't imitate their

[models'] image, as I think unique is very important to me.” Thus, although the magazines provide huge amount of ‘ideal female’ images to their readers, but whether to be followed still depends on the readers. They can ‘pick up’ the ideas or ‘mix’ them with their favor, or just ‘put down’.

5.3.2 Consumption behaviour: the magazines win or the readers win

Even though some of my respondents stressed that the magazines had little influence on their self-image creation, but then became self-contradictory in answering questions about the magazines’ consumption guide. All of them said the fashion magazines to some degree have affected and guided their decision in consumption, and most of them followed the fashion trends introduced by the magazines in shopping. Therefore, it seems plausible that the magazines affected the readers’ self-image creations firstly and then had impact on their consumption behavior, since the self-image creation and consumption behaviour could be inconnected. For the readers, they just regarded the products on the magazines as ‘commodity’, but didn’t realize the ‘ideal female’ image combined with these products and then could affect their self-image creation indirectly.

I made my interviewees into two age groups (one group aged between 18 to 22, and the other group aged over 22), as they could enjoy different consumption patterns. Interestingly, by comparing the response of interviewees, I found that the younger Japanese readers enjoyed the magazines’ shopping guide much more, while the other group Japanese readers were more critical and rational on the magazines’ promotion content. When asked about whether and how the magazines encouraged them to buy some so-called fashionable products, the younger Japanese female straightforwardly expressed they were highly involved.

I usually follow the model’s style to buy clothes. And sometimes, I exactly copied what the model dressed to buy the same clothes, same shoes and accessories...I even bought something I never thought I would buy before I read the magazines.

(Miss Y, a 19 years old undergraduate student)

When I find one is cute on the magazines, I would call the shop firstly to check out whether it is sold out [sometimes the products are too popular since they have been advertised on magazines], if not, I will go to store to buy it...I usually surely decided I want to have it before I go to store and even didn't try it on before I buy it.

(Miss A, a 19-year-old undergraduate student)

In contrast, Japanese readers aged over 22 years old are apparently more rational and critical on purchasing the advertised products.

I used to but now neither follow the ways of dressing on the magazines, nor buy their promoted products...I have baby now, and she is growing up, those products are not functional for me to take good care of my baby, such as the high heels, is not easy to walk by wearing them.

(A 28-year-old housewife)

I buy facial products according to the magazines' instruction because the cosmetic is not that expensive and hard to learn which one is better and popular by seeing from other people's face on the street...clothes are too expensive sometimes, so I would buy some similar styles in cheaper price.

(A 24-year-old master's student, unmarried)

I always think about whether it [advertised products on the magazines] is suitable for me.

(A 29-year-old employed female, unmarried)

I don't buy the so-called popular products displayed on the magazines; because I know that is intentional promotion.

(A 27-year-old employed female, unmarried)

Therefore, it is illustrated that younger Japanese girls are easier to be affected by magazines promotion, or even exactly copy the dressings of model on magazines. This result are similar to what Gauntlett (2002b:183) have found after reviewing prior researches, “teenagers to be more enthusiastically engaged with the magazines” than older young woman, and he continued, “they are in the way of learning how women should be like by women’s magazines, and the fashion magazines give them the inculcation for being body attractive”, but for older age women “they highlighted the importance of ‘being yourself’”.

Whatever, no matter the Japanese readers aged under 22 years old or over, to some degree, their consumption have been affected by women’s fashion magazines directly or indirectly. My interviewees indicated that the fashion magazines make them pay more attention to those magazine-promoted products when they were shopping. But when asked about luxury consumption, it’s another story. Though they got a lot of information about luxury products from the magazines, they didn’t buy luxury products despite stimulation from these fashion magazines. The reasons could be various, but mostly the expensive price is the primary factor. For my respondents, they didn’t buy luxury products, except for some cosmetics or perfume in comparatively cheaper price, or some bags that can be used for a long time. Most of them claimed that the biggest reason stimulating them to buy luxury product is the high quality of the products. For them, luxury means high quality, but they didn’t obtain this message from the magazines, but from their friends, sisters or mothers who have this kind of products. Secondly, for most of them, buying luxury products is not only a simple purchasing, “it is a reward” said the 27-year-old office lady. What’s more, the 19-year-old Japanese girl made no disguise of her thoughts, “If I can afford it, I will buy it [luxury products] because I can show off to my friends”, the same for another 19-year-old Japanese girl. Obviously, luxury consumption was involved with some social elements for them, such as connections with the surrounding people (e.g. sisterhood) — in other words, the people around them who have this kind of products

gave them the idea to buy due to the ‘high-quality’ mark (it’s not only the high quality of the product, but could also suggest the holder’s high-quality life) people around showed off to them. On the other hand, they may seek to improve their societal status by purchasing luxury products (show off to people around). All in all, the fashion magazines rarely stimulated Japanese readers to buy luxury products, though they provide the latest trend information of those products to readers. These prestigious luxury products may already enjoy a highly prestigious reputation even if there were no magazines to promote them.

6. Conclusion

With the help of visual analysis of magazines and interviews of female Japanese readers, this study examined the images of Japanese women portrayed in women’s fashion magazines, and how the fashion magazines have affected Japanese women’s self-image creation and consumption behaviour. Women’s fashion magazines in Japan provided female readers with a ‘women world’ in which certain prototypes are established for beauty, fashion, male-female relations, and the home. For female Japanese readers, these fashion magazines played several roles. On the one hand, the fashion magazines served as ‘consumption guide’, ‘beauty textbook’, or manuals to learn about building pleasurable lifestyles. On the other hand, reading the fashion magazines could also simply be a way of relaxation and/or seeing their favorite models.

For the role of Japan’s ‘full-time housewives’, images stereotypically of the Japanese magazines portrayed submissively and physically attractive women as objects of desire, which responds to the idea that Japanese women ought to be subordinate to men. In addition, the *Kawaii* beauties are still very prevalent for Japanese women. These stereotypical representations of Japanese women in the magazines are due to the unavoidable stereotyping by mass media in its representations. It is worthy to note that the female images in the Japanese fashion

magazines tend to tell their readers how the Japanese 'ideal female' should look like and behave, rather than reflect how Japanese female really look like and behave in society.

Women's fashion magazine in Japan delivered "a sheer volume of promotional material" (Burton 2005: 133) to their female readers and try to promote these products by packing the products together with a so-called 'ideal female' image. Although it would appear to have impact on female readers' self-image creation and then female consumption behaviour, establishing this fact is not easy. My respondents showed a wide range of response to the magazines' influence on their self-image creation and consumption behaviour. Even though all of them admitted that the fashion magazines helped them to improve their aesthetics (what they think to be 'beautiful') and have exerted a certain degree of influence on their consumption behaviour, they themselves hold the power of decision on whether to follow the magazines' instructions or not. The fashion magazines gave young Japanese women an 'ideal female' image via the promoted products, but that does not mean the readers will or must accept it and attached it to their own self-image creations. They are given images to compare against themselves, but still, they have the power to choose to pick up these visual cues, mix them with own preferences, or even just put them aside. On the other hand, even if Japanese women followed the 'ideal female' image that does not mean they can only achieve it by using the advertised products, while if the 'ideal female' image doesn't appeal to them, this does not mean either that they cannot buy some of the advertised product. Purchasing is purchasing, the self-image creations and the consumption behaviour do not need to be correlated.

In addition, although the fashion magazines have shown massive cues about luxury consumption to Japanese readers, the readers actually received little stimulation to buy luxury products from these magazines. Such high-end luxury products do not only mean 'commodity' to them, and they may already be so prestigious that

Japanese women would continue to buy them even if there were no magazine promotions. Perhaps, like what the editor I interviewed said, “Readers want information about *Chanel* (luxury brands), and then we contacted *Chanel* and displayed them in the magazines”. The causality could be reversed. It is not women’s fashion magazines that encourage Japanese women to purchase luxury products, but actually Japanese women’s active consumption behaviour in luxury products that aroused the demand for luxury information and thus consequently pushing the magazines to provide information about luxury brands. This direction of causation needs to be clarified in the future.

When analyzing the relationships among Japanese women, women’s fashion magazines, and luxury brands, one can see the clear mutually beneficial relationships between the magazines and luxury brands, as well as between the magazines and female Japanese readers, but there was no clear triangular relationship among the three. The three are more like standing in a line with the magazines in the middle, and the female readers/consumers and luxury brands are at the two ends. The relationship between female readers and luxury brands in the context of promotion by fashion magazines is unclear and need to be further researched.

In this study, given that I focused exclusively on the conservative style magazines in Japan, the results do not reflect the whole range of images available to Japanese women. Studies in the future could cover other styles of women’s fashion magazines to produce a more comprehensive understanding of women’s roles and images in Japan. In addition, since the visual text of the magazines mainly dealt with fashion and beauty, other articles, such as those about male-female relations and women’s self-development were excluded. But they would provide helpful texts to further study on the gender role of Japanese women, which could more accurately reflect Japanese women’s image and roles from other perspectives. In conclusion, although women’s magazines have been commonly accused that they make women feel bad about themselves by “repetitive celebration of a beauty ideal which almost women will not

be able to match” (Gauntlett 2002b: 191), I would argue that women themselves retain the power to ‘pick up’ or ‘put down’ the magazines’ instructions, or to pick and choose among the instructions and create their own image. In the push and pull contest between women and women’s fashion magazines when it comes to female image-creation and consumption, it is women themselves to decide the outcome.

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CanCam, August 2007, Japan Shogakukan.

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Ginza, August 2007, 122(8), Japan: Magazinehouse, Ltd., Japan.

More, August 2007, 362(8), Japan: Shueisha

Spur, August 2007, 214(8), Japan: Shueisha.

Spring, September 2007, Japan: Takarajimasha.

Precious, December 2007, Japan: Shogakukan.

With, August 2007, 313(8), Japan: Kodansha.

Appendix I

Circulation list of Women's Magazines in Japan (August 2007)

Source (JMPA 2007)

Magazine	Publisher	Circulation Number	
nicola	新潮社	168,071	*
ハナチュー	主婦の友社	124,108	*
ピチレモン	学習研究社	171,350	*
ラブベリー	徳間書店	122,629	*
ES POSHH!	リイド社	100,000	
Cawaii!	主婦の友社	156,137	*
SEVENTEEN	集英社	360,476	*
Zipper	祥伝社	221,725	*
Cobalt	集英社	50,000	*
ViVi	講談社	453,750	*
ウーフィン・ガール	シンコーミュージック・ エンタテイメント	160,000	
CanCam	小学館	715,417	*
JJ	光文社	364,483	*
PINKY	集英社	210,833	*
Ray	主婦の友社	244,683	*
S Cawaii!	主婦の友社	213,184	*
JILLE	双葉社	136,017	*
SEDA	日之出出版	183,242	*
non・no	集英社	440,870	*
PS	小学館	235,417	*
mina	主婦の友社	239,481	*
Fine	日之出出版	100,018	*

with	講談社	590,000	*
MORE	集英社	597,500	*
25ans	アシェット婦人画報社	87,108	*
NIKITA	主婦と生活社	46,892	*
GINZA	マガジンハウス	98,467	*
SPUR	集英社	119,583	*
装苑	文化出版局	78,334	*
ELLE JAPON	アシェット婦人画報社	100,359	*
marie claire	アシェット婦人画報社	40,992	*
Vingtaine	アシェット婦人画報社	89,842	*
Oggi	小学館	233,333	*
CLASSY.	光文社	215,517	*
GISELe	主婦の友社	97,482	*
Style	講談社	86,750	*
Domani	小学館	150,417	*
BAILA	集英社	159,167	*
BOAO	マガジンハウス	76,008	*
MISS	世界文化社	47,213	*
LUCi	扶桑社	155,633	*
GLAMOROUS	講談社	131,834	*
月刊ブシコ	ポプラ社	46,923	*
SAY	青春出版社	63,000	*
PHPカラット	PHP研究所	100,000	
PHPスペシャル	PHP研究所	190,022	*
MISTY	実業之日本社	110,000	
ar	主婦と生活社	128,267	*
anan	マガジンハウス	280,673	*
CREA	文藝春秋	99,000	*
日経ウーマン	日経ホーム出版社	153,233	*
FRaU	講談社	85,250	*
VERY	光文社	238,900	*
Grazia	講談社	80,083	*

Como	主婦の友社	111,692	*
LEE	集英社	311,667	*
Rumina	角川書店（角川クロスメ ディア）	110,000	
STORY	光文社	207,467	*
Precious	小学館	113,333	*
STORY	光文社	207,467	*
Precious	小学館	113,333	*
家庭画報	世界文化社	170,033	*
婦人画報	アシェット婦人画報社	115,075	*
婦人之友	婦人之友社	90,000	
ミセス	文化出版局	116,667	*
40代から、もつときれい	主婦と生活社	31,875	*
和楽	小学館	30,000	*
婦人公論	中央公論新社	212,400	*
クロワッサン	マガジンハウス	298,796	*
毎日が発見	角川SSコミュニケーションズ	120,000	
ゆうゆう	主婦の友社	106,059	*

Note: (1) Women's entertainment magazines are excluded in this list.

(2) Circulation numbers with star marks are proved by printing proof.