

***Kawaii* Evaluation in Different Cultures**

Based on Fashion and Car

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Abstract: This paper aims to reveal the *kawaii* design evaluation on culture aspect between Japan and other country taken Malaysia as the example. To obtain the research objective, a survey on categorization of intimacy between *kawaii* image is done between both countries in fashion attire and car. Samples were arranged in paired for evaluation and analyzed by Mds. Cluster analysis is done to group the samples in Mds map. For Japanese, the groups of fashion are [adult-*kawaii*], [elegant], [dressy] and [mote-*kawaii*]. For Malaysia, the groups are [stylish], [teen], [rare] and [*ayu*]. While, for Japanese car the groups were [tall and short], [round and small], [significant bold] and [dynamic and robust]. For Malaysian, groups were [rounded-look], [sporty-look], [volumetric] and [boxy-and-small]. For fashion, it can be said that the Japanese who own the *kawaii* culture has higher and wider understanding on it. They evaluate in total image. For Malaysian, they concerned on detail with their familiarity such as culture and weather. For car area, both Japanese and Malaysian observed the overall image and detail aspect of the car. Then, it is also observed that Malaysian has higher desire for sporty image even in *kawaii* car evaluation.

Keywords: *Kawaii* trend, culture, evaluation

1. Introduction

'Fancy goods' that have long enraptured Japanese girls indicates that accessories and cute items, which known nowadays as *kawaii* were seen since early 19th century [1]. This word has now become a globally recognized word and is regarded as a key concept in characterizing the modern Japanese culture [2]. Various *kawaii* items in fashion, character and decorative items have market scale about 2 million yen, which gives a big meaning for cultural goods in society [3].

This *kawaii* culture has been transited throughout the world including to Asia in lots of items, from light to heavy industry in various dimension, especially to attract female consumer by offering another kind of trend that interesting yet acceptable for all age level. As *kawaii* being transited to other places, there might be similarity and dissimilarity of the *kawaii* trend image according to the acceptance and understand level of one place. Moreover, to what extent of *kawaii* culture influenced other place is still a question.

2. Research objective

The aim of this study is to observe the *kawaii* evaluation among Japan and other country taken Malaysia as the example. Malaysia is chosen due to the culture is really different with Japan in terms of the culture background. Firstly, observation is done on the recent actual understanding of *kawaii* among young Japanese. Then, a study to determine to what extent the Malaysian understand the *kawaii* with influenced of their own culture is done too. Besides that, the potential of *kawaii* culture in enhancing the trend version in other region is also the aim of the study.

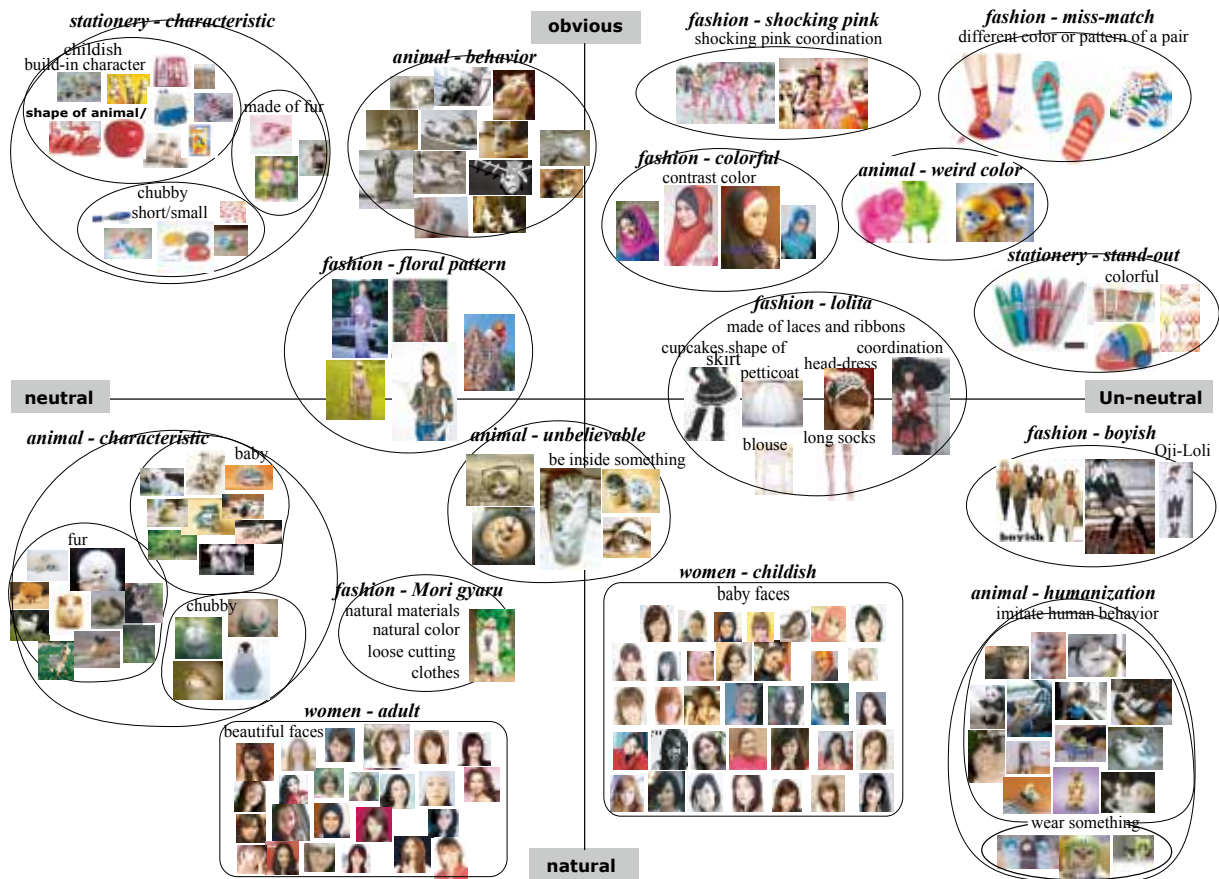


Figure 1 Pre-research on *Kawaii* Trend

3. Background on *kawaii* meaning, usage and history

Kawaii is a Japanese word that is translated as cute in English and bring a wider meaning such as tiny, cute, lovely and so on [4]. It is also a unique connotation that is not fully transferable to other languages. *Kawaii* is actually altered form of `kawayui` which means ashamed. The usage of *kawaii* has been changes and getting wider by time to time. *Kawaii* bring a positive emotion as the social motivation for protecting and nurturing others [5]. It is used in sense of piteous towards things, as a sense of affection towards child and women. Besides that, *kawaii* is used to describe lovely and small things, and as a kind of compliment towards elder people.

4. Research method

4.1 Pre-research

Pre-research is done to observe the *kawaii* things of Japan through several discussions among Japanese in 20s. Then, a discussion among Malaysian who was in age of 20s was done too. Samples were taken from the magazine, books and internet. A *kawaii* map is determined with axis of [obvious-natural] and [neutral -unneutral]. As the result, there are 16 kinds of categorization for *kawaii* groups in various fashion, merchandise, animal behavior and women face. This initial study is used as early information to understand the general *kawaii* image. [Figure 1]

4.2 Overview

To get the aim of the study, a survey is done to observe the similarity of *kawaii* image in fashion and car. Samples were selected by a group discussion among Japanese, who has the neutral opinion in *kawaii* ideas. Oppositely, as Malaysia is the target area for the *kawaii* trend transition happen, there might be some innovation happen to the *kawaii* trend due to the consideration on culture. Due to there are quite number of questionnaire, only several potential respondents were selected.

Even though the numbers of respondents is small, the expected result will be gained because of this survey is target to observe the similarity which needs a basic evaluation only [6]. Fashion and car trends are selected as the example for *kawaii* image evaluation between both countries. It is believed that the fashion area show the short trend changes, and car show the long and slow trend changes.

4.3 Selection of survey sample and respondent

30 samples of various kind of *kawaii* fashion attire for young female in Japan were chosen from the latest magazines and internet, selected by several discussions among Japanese. 3 female respondents from each countries were selected. Then, 22 samples of car based on its basic shape from rounded to boxy were selected. All respondents are male, due to their higher preference and understanding in car. It is believed that there is lots of *kawaii* influence in Japanese car not only for the *Kei*-car and small car but also the sedan car.

4.4 Questionnaire arrangement and data analysis

Samples for questionnaire were arranged in pair for the *kawaii* image intimacy evaluation. The sample pair numbers is determined by formula; $A = n(n-1) / 2$. Thus, there are 435 pairs of questions for fashion attire and 231 pairs of questions, evaluated by five like-ert scale from [totally similar] to [totally different]. Data collected is then arranged in square symmetric in dissimilarity ordered class and analyzed by Mds. Pattern matrix for each sample category is prepared. S-stress for all sample groups is analyzed too. For fashion, there are 2 dimensional solutions for both countries. For car, the dimensional solution is 2 for Japanese and 3 for Malaysian [Figure 2]. To group the mds map, cluster analysis is done too. Nearer position among samples, the stronger relation of similarity among samples, and vice versa. Comparative study is done between both countries to observe the understanding Malaysian people about the Japanese *kawaii* trend.

5. Result

5.1 Analysis of *kawaii* trend understanding in Mds map

Actually, it is hard to compare the mds map of fashion between Japanese and Malaysian due to the different axis categorization. However, as this is the initial study for *kawaii* image evaluation between regions, any potential data is used. As the *kawaii* is the Japanese original trend, it can be said that they able to group *kawaii* fashion and car into groups which represented the *kawaii* culture in Japan. However, for Malaysian, as the *kawaii* trend is the adaptation from Japanese culture, their categorization on the *kawaii* image might be different to Japanese. Therefore, to what extend Malaysian view point on *kawaii* trend with the consideration on their own culture will be explained too.

5.2 Explanation on *kawaii* fashion by respondent groups

5.2.1 Fashion [figure 3]

Japanese mds map axis for *kawaii* fashion is categorized into [adult-childish] and [dressy-casual]. There are 4 groups known as [adult-*kawaii*], [dressy], [elegant] and [mote-*kawaii*]. [Adult-*kawaii*] is a unique category in Japanese *kawaii* fashion. This fashion trend is more to attire that wear with pants by women in late 20s, which concern to be beautiful and sexy with feminine style. In other words, adult-*kawaii* is for women who are not

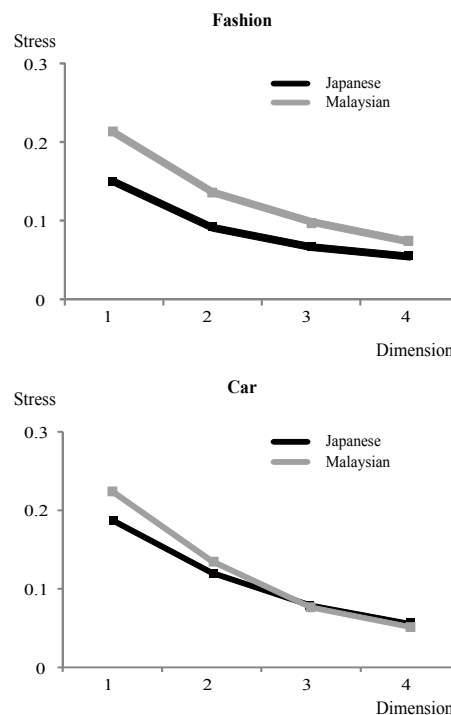


Figure 2 S-stress for Fashion and Car

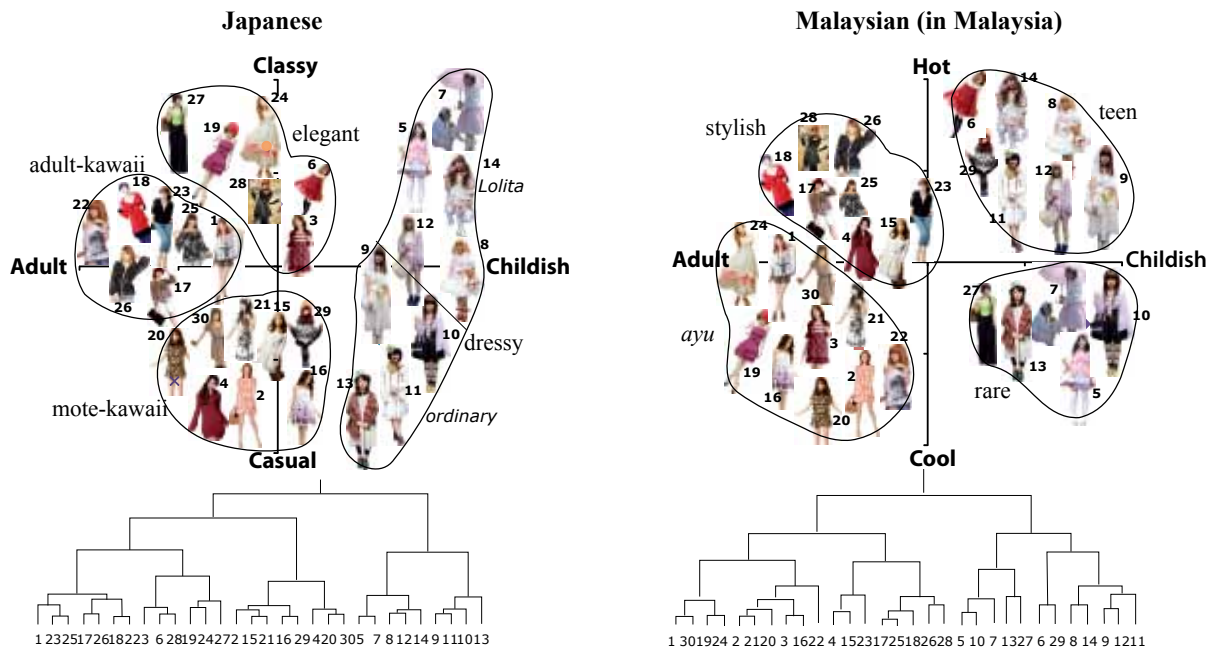


Figure 3 *Kawaii* Mds Map for Fashion



Figure 4 Malaysian Fashion Trend by Years

losing any passion to keep themselves grown-up *kawaii* with their age appropriateness [7].

[*Mote-kawaii*] fashion is a very popular category among women in early 20s. They prefer over pink baby doll dresses, white lace dresses, and other cute, feminine clothes. This cute style has become a favorite look for dates and parties alike, that aim to catch men's attention. This look has been dubbed into [*mote-kawaii*] trend which comes from the words *moteru* (to be sought after) and *kawaii* (cute). [*Mote-kawaii*] girl is popular among members of the same and opposite gender [8].

[*Dressy*] is more on *Lolita* attire, which is very popular in Japan with soft color and *kawaii* design. However, in Europe such as France, most of *Lolita* outfit were in black color and very Gothic in style, which was unique to European fashion. They were wearing a jumper skirt without a blouse, showing some skin. However, recently they dressed in the same way as the Japanese to have *kawaii* look [9]. [*Elegant*] trend attires are mostly more to

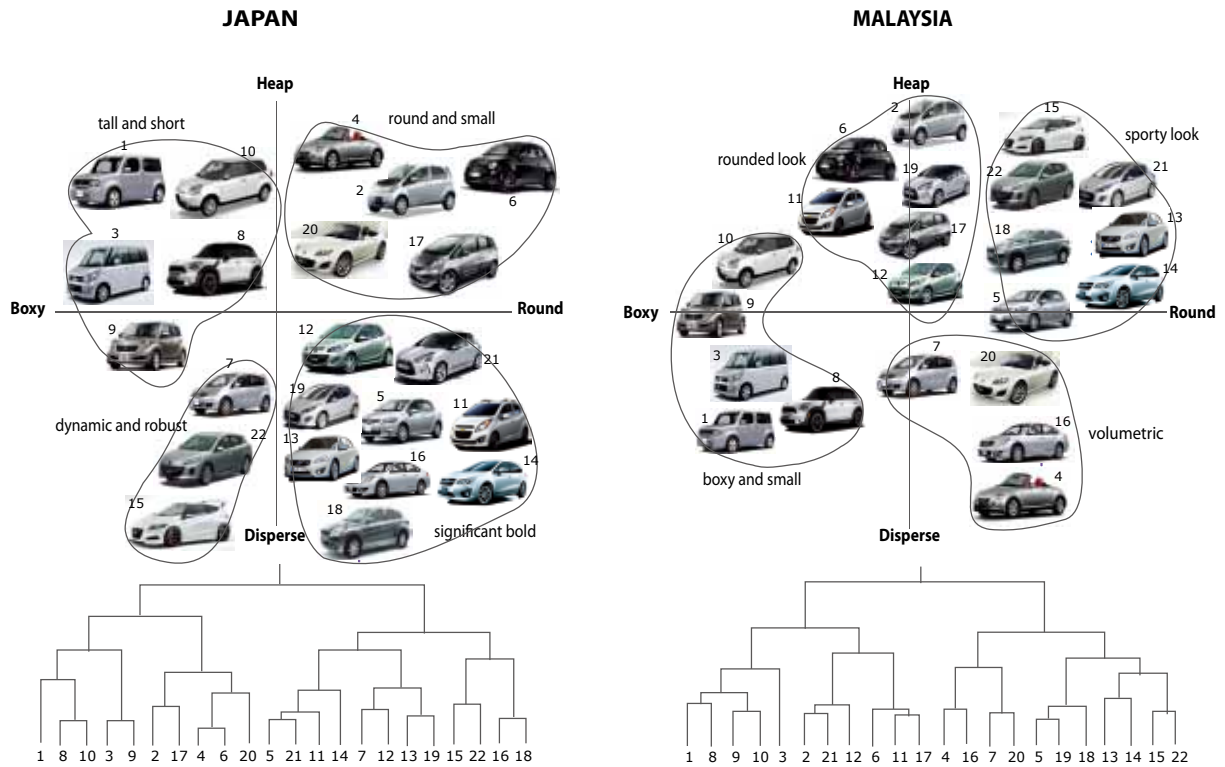


Figure 5 *Kawaii* Mds Map for Car

attire for certain events. Attires wear with a hat known as “celebrity looks” which has elegant impression [10].

Overall, for Malaysian they categorized the *kawaii* fashion into [adult-childish] and [hot-cool]. The detail groups in the perceptual map are [stylish], [teen], [rare], and [ayu]. [Stylish] group is more to attire that wears with pants as a chic style which are similar to Japanese [adult-*kawaii*]. [Teen] and [rare] group is for attire with layers such as *Lolita*, which this kind of attires has been adapted and innovated but still occasional in Malaysia. [Rare] attire group is mostly not wear in everyday lifestyle in Malaysia especially the material is not suitable to the Malaysian weather.

[Ayu] attires are similar as explained before, which towards feminine style and soft look. Ayu term bring a meaning such as beautiful, soft and attractive which more towards characteristics [11]. In daily life, ayu word mostly use for Malay women who keep up their fashion that in feminine style, soft look and well-manner with the influence of Islamic culture. Recently, the [ayu] fashion getting more popular with incompliance to the Islamic women fashion guideline which is innovated to be more stylish and modern look. In Malaysia, [ayu] attire is mostly towards traditional attire, which comes with long skirt and blouse that in pair. Most of Malaysian women enjoys order-made tailor for this kind of attire which has various styles and colors [figure 4].

5.2.2 Car [figure 5]

Japanese categorized *kawaii* image for car by looking at overall and detail aspect. There are 2 kinds of axis in mds map which are [boxy-round] and [heap-disperse]. 22 car samples [table 2] are grouped into 4 groups which are [tall and short], [round and small], [significant bold] and [dynamic and robust]. [Tall and short] is categorized in the same *kawaii* groups due to it detail aspect such as shape. Car samples with *kawaii* image due to its rounded front view image and small shape is categorized as [round and small]. It is hard to name other 2 groups. However, based on the total car samples image, the groups are named as [significant bold] and [dynamic and robust].

For Malaysian, they also grouped the *kawaii* image in car by looking at the overall and detail image too. In the Mds map, the 2 axis are [boxy-round] and [heap-disperse]. 4 groups of car samples are [rounded-look], [sporty-

look], [volumetric] and [boxy and small]. [Rounded-look] is grouped due to similarity in its soft image on its shape. [Sport-look] group is car sample that being categorized for its similarity in sporty image. Even though this study is the evaluation on the *kawaii* image, Malaysian realized the sporty image on car. One of the reason is that, Malaysian has higher preference in sporty image of car regardless car types. Then there is a [volumetric] group. It is hard to give a name for this group. However, this group is named based on total image. [Boxy and small] car group is categorized based on the boxy and small car.

In early 1980s, Japanese car has started the active involvement in local Malaysia car industry. Since that, the local car company in Malaysia introduces the Japanese car with the consideration of the Malaysian taste. As the result, today, the best-selling automaker in Malaysia is the local company which is Perodua Sdn. Bhd [12]. It can be said that, Malaysian people have already get the influence and getting familiar to the Japanese car style too. Thus, in this study, both respondent groups have similarity and also dissimilarity in their evaluation of *kawaii* Japanese car.

6. Conclusion

For *kawaii* fashion evaluation, both Japanese and Malaysian realized whether the fashion is adult or childish. Then, Japanese categorized detail on the *kawaii* fashion into classy or casual. In other words, Japanese know detail on *kawaii* fashion and could differentiate their attires trend according to several detail groups.

For Malaysians, due to *kawaii* is actually from other culture which is the Japanese, so, their understanding is based on the information level they get and also familiarity such as culture and weather. They also categorized the *kawaii* fashion into hot or cool which is also relates into attire material observation. For example, the [stylish] is grouped follow the recent fashion trend flow, [ayu] is based on culture consideration and 2 other groups are based on familiarity on this trend is rare to them.

For *kawaii* car evaluation, both Japanese and Malaysian observed the overall car image and also on some detail aspect on the car. Then, for Malaysian, as they also have higher preference on the sporty car, the evaluation resulted into categorization on sporty elements even for the *kawaii* car.

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