

More feminine than woman: Otokonoko by Caroline Kwok

Long and bushy lashes, watery eyes, wavy long hair, high heels and miniskirts are what you would not expect to see on Alisa Lau and Tsang Tsing because they are authenticity guaranteed -- men.

Otokonoko refers to males who dresses, act and resemble as females. Otokonoko first appeared in a Japanese manga series "Stop!! Hibari-kun!" by Hisashi Eguchi in 1981 which a male character, Hibari Ōzora, goes to school as a female.

The character was created to mock the popular teen girl manga in the 1980s. Well-received, the manga series coined Otokonoko and this genre of comics continued to gain popularity in the early 2000's worldwide.

In recent years, comic fans try to bring Otokonoko into real life. In May 1, 2009, Otokonoko maid cafes like "NEWTYPE" arose in Japan. Dec 2010, online shopping website "Lagrangel", which sells clothing specifically for Otokonoko, was founded.

In Hong Kong, Otokonokos are also bringing this fashion style for men to the streets.

Tsang Tsing, 30, has been an Otokonoko for almost six years. Tsang said he enjoys compliments on the female image he recreated with makeup and clothing instead of compliments on his masculinity that he was born with. "I want to be more feminine than women" Tsang said.

Alisa Lau, 25, has been an Otokonoko for about three years. Lau said he likes women's fashion that has a wide variety of makeup and clothing styles ranging from sexy to cute while men's wear only have a narrow range of fashion choices available that surrounds t-shirts and jeans.

Lau said he likes criticism because it challenges him to improve his makeup skills. He likes being misunderstood as a female in public because it proves that he successfully "blend in" with his female friends.

Different from cosplay, drag queens and LGBT, Otokonoko recognize themselves as heterosexual males who does not dress up as females for entertainment on stage nor as costumes to mimic a certain animate character. Instead, they treat their attire as a style of regular clothing.

Being in a stable relationship with his girlfriend, Tsang said Otokonoko did not change his sexuality because it is just a style of clothing. "It's strange that we're ok with females wearing men's clothing but not the other way around." He said. Clothing should not be limited to any gender, Tsang said.

Lau, Who is also heterosexual, said Otokonoko is different from sexual fetishism because Otokonoko is a full package of skills used to create the feminine shapes and image rather than just sexual attachments to a certain object. From your outer wear to your inner garments and even the way you behave are efforts to resemble females, he said.

However, they pay heavy pink tax to recreate their ideal look.

Lau and Tsang both rent a storage unit in Diamond Hill and Kwun Tong respectively just to store away their corsets, wigs, high heels, makeup palettes, body-shaping under garments and hosierys that add up to over \$30,000.

Tsang said it usually takes him around 90 minutes to get dresses because not a single detail can be missed otherwise they will fail to trick people's eyes.

Otokonoko is a luxurious hobby due to the time they invest in practicing makeup, dieting and dressing up inside out to recreate the female figure, Lau said so while complaining on his recent weight gain.

Lau said because the activity is time consuming, he only dress up as Otokonoko three to four times a month or even once every few months.

Tsang expressed the same concern and said 40 may be the age limit for Otokonoko because makeup will no longer look good with wrinkles and poor skin conditions while men's body shape will change and become difficult to dress in female clothes.

Professional makeup artist Sharon Lam Yuk Kuen, 37, who specializes in special effect makeup said contouring and highlighting is the most important skill for Otokonoko to create the feminine facial features. She also recommend Otokonoko to pay attention to skin care since makeup sticks better on smooth skin.

She suggests Otokonoko to wear clothes that hides their Adam's apple, large frame

size and other muscular body parts.

Tsang said the development of Otokonoko in Hong Kong is almost ten years behind Japan and Hong Kong people are too conservative compared to Taiwanese.

Otokonoko is just another style of clothing for males, another way to express our freedom to dress, Tsang said.

Lau and Tsang said they see the Otokonoko community growing in Hong Kong due to the society's increasing acceptance to androgynous gender images. They said they step up to inspire other males that it is ok to like female clothing styles and they should not be afraid to wear it in public.