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DISCUSSING JAPANESE SCHOOL UNIFORMS FROM GENDER PERSPECTIVE

Introduction

In this paper I would like to focus on Japanese gender-free school uniforms and problems associated with this issue. Firstly, I would like to introduce some information regarding Japanese school uniforms.

The basic style of school uniform, stand-up collar uniform for male students emerged in 1879. With regard to female school uniforms at that time, they were worn as a *Hakama* at first. Then, sailor type school uniforms started to be popular among schoolgirls from around the 1920's. Around the 1960's, blazer style uniforms appeared along with student movements. This type of uniform was adopted by many schools from around the 1980's. Since the 1990's, school uniforms have become more and more fashionable. More recently, there are variety of different styles of uniforms which have become popular (Kankoo, 2021).

From this history, I would like to focus on gender free type school uniforms. Uniforms introduced in many Japanese schools used to be slacks for boys and skirts for girls. But in recent years, more and more schools are allowing girls to choose slacks. On the other hand, not many schools have allowed boys to choose skirts. While outside of school, gender-neutral clothing is common, in a school environment it is not. I believe that skirts for boys should be allowed as well. In this presentation, I will discuss some reasons for such differences and consider how Japanese schools and society should recognize the diversity of gender. My question is that why a skirt type of school uniform for male student is not widespread.

The Reason Why Slacks for Girls Was Introduced

Firstly, the reasons behind the introduction of slacks for girls will be examined. There are basically three reasons: Functionality, presenting more choices and dealing with students with Gender Identity Disorder. About functionality, according to a study of risk/benefit attitudes of female college students regarding pants and skirt styles, many felt that slacks were a benefit in terms of aspects such as ease of movement and resistance to getting cold, issues that are more problematic with the wearing of skirts (Hashimoto, 2007). Also, many felt that the many colors/patterns and femininity of the skirts were a benefit. Then, let's think the reason why skirt should be introduced to boys. Although skirt's functionality can be replaced by short pants, perspective of making more choices, and dealing with Gender Identity Disorder Students is still an important reason.

Students' Attitude to Gender Free School Uniform

In consideration of creating gender free uniforms, what kind of things do students regard as important or relevant? A survey which researched high school students' attitudes toward the uniform choice system showed that while 70% of students wanted to use the system, they indicated that the eyes of those around them would be a hurdle if adopting such a system (School General Election Project, 2021). Especially boys who want to use skirts, the idea that it is not common for men to wear skirts in today's society may be a biggest hurdle. From the start, why is it common for men to wear only pants while women wear pants and skirts? As a hypothesis, I thought that skirts and trousers, now considered to be opposites like histogram of toilet, were not inherently completely opposite.

The History of Skirts and Trousers

Then, let's examine the history of skirts and trousers. Until the medieval times, both men and women wore long scroll robes or loin kind cloths. Since medieval times, a gender difference that men wore pants and women wore skirts was born. In the 15th century, the *pourpoint*, a short jacket for men, appeared, and the *chausse* appeared as its leg cloth. Originally, the *pourpoint* was a cloth worn by men under their armor. Meanwhile, a women-only costume *robe* was also introduced at this time. It is thought that the fashionable nature of the robe itself was considered more important than its functionality. More recently as women entered the general workforce from the early 20th century, women's skirts have been replaced by pants. In other words, it can be said that from the original garment, the trousers emphasized functionality, and the skirt emphasized the meaning it represents in itself. It is possible to assume that the reason why women easily began to wear trousers is that they are not really recognized as an item of clothing without being associated with masculinity.

How School Uniforms Have Been Represented

Then, how about Japanese school uniform? I'll show how those have been represented. Research has shown that "the stand-up collar design symbolized the school spirit of *patriotism and valor, fidelity and soundness, and diligence and thrift*. The sailor-type uniform was favored as a design that symbolized the school spirit of *obedience, chastity, and neatness* that the school demanded of its female students" (Banba, 2018).

Schools used to be places that trained people to contribute to the nation, and only children from privileged classes could attend. Thus, the uniform was a sign that a person was a member of society's elite. The uniforms projected the image of the human being that the state wanted to cultivate (Banba, 2011).

Problems of School Uniforms

English artist Eric Gill wrote about clothes and gender in his writing: "Skirts are not for ladies only, nor pants for gentlemen. Was the kilt-wearing Scotsman weak and feeble? Were Turkish women who wore trouser-like clothing manly? Is there no gender just because Indians wear neither pants nor skirts?" (Kitakata, 2019). From these facts, it can be said skirts and

trousers themselves originally had no meaning, and meaning is determined depending on the gender perspective at specific times in history. That is to say if the view of gender changes, those meanings can be replaced. So it is entirely possible that the idea that men can wear skirts may become common. In fact, since women began to wear trousers, a gender difference that men wear pants and women wear skirts was broken. However, it's not easy to change people's view of gender. In the first place, it is supposed to say the uniform itself, differentiated by gender, reproduces the meaning of skirts, slacks and other uniforms connected with masculinity and femininity. Banba (2018) showed that research in 1989 showed high school student's images for collar-type uniform is strongly connected with masculinity. On the other hand, around the 1990's, there had been a lot of model change of school uniform and female school uniforms became fashionable. Then, it began to be recognized strongly connected with cuteness.

From these issues, the problem is the school uniforms themselves, which specify different outfits for men and women. Therefore, one possible means would be to stop limiting uniform bottoms to two types: skirts and slacks. Then, it is expected that by adding forms of uniforms that are not similar to ordinary school uniforms, such as short pants or trouser skirts can help student to wear whatever they want including skirts same as outside of school, because, it will not only make skirts and slacks as one option, but also be a chance to change the way of reproducing. As this picture showed, a trouser skirt is important because it represents less cuteness.

Conclusion

To sum up, the reason why skirts for male student is not widespread is that our thoughts of clothes and gender has not changed yet. I came to two conclusions. Firstly, skirts and slacks are not opposites. That is why slacks are easily accepted by women, and skirt is hardly accepted by men. It can be said the meaning of skirts as feminine and trousers as masculine is added. Also, meaning is determined depending on representations of gender at specific times in history. Our perspective of gender changes a lot now so it can be replaced at any time. Secondly, to reduce student's hesitation when using uniform choice system, it is needed to change gender views in society. Changing school uniforms, which specify different outfits for men and women, will be a chance to change our thoughts about the relationship between clothes and gender. Students may be less concerned about the eyes of others by doing so.

The process that men begin wear skirts generally will be unlikely the process as when women started wearing pants, so it is hard for GID student to wear skirts. As I mentioned before, however, I believe that it is essential to deal with those students.

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