

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Tokyo Teenagers

Elisa Leonelli · Wednesday, July 27th, 2022

In the spring of 1986, I decided to travel to Tokyo to further explore that amazing metropolis that I had briefly visited in December 1981 on my way back from my fabulous [photo trip to China](#). I chose the month of April to experience cherry blossom season, I focused on a photographic essay of Tokyo teenagers, but also visited Kyoto and photographed other subjects on 35mm slides with my Nikon cameras. See a mother and daughter dressed in traditional costume for the [Sanja Matsuri Festival](#).



Sanja Matsuri Festival, Tokyo © Elisa Leonelli

In the fall of 1985, I had photographed — mostly in my Hollywood studio on 120mm Ektachrome with my Hasselblad — an essay on American teenagers. In January 1986, I had an exhibit of large prints at LA Nicola Gallery titled [Teenage USA](#). So it seemed interesting to document the

different fashion style of Japanese teenagers.



Girls in Shibuya, Tokyo © Elisa Leonelli

Here's some excerpts from the article I wrote in 1986.

In the past few years Tokyo has become a fashion capital on par with New York and Paris. Most of

the teenagers are into trendy clothes, as it's apparent when you see them walking through Tokyo's youth towns, such as Shibuya or the Harajuku area, where groups of teenagers called the [Bamboo Shoot Tribe](#) congregate on Sunday afternoons. They wear colorful satin clothes and baggy pants, and perform original dances at the sound of ghetto blasters in the middle of the street.



Bamboo Shoot Tribe, Tokyo © Elisa Leonelli

The carefree attitude of the young Japanese corresponds to a new outlook on life of the so called “no hunger” generation. Born in the 1960s they have not experienced the hardships of rebuilding the country after the destruction of World War II. They tend to reject the rigid work ethic of their parents and feel a need for individual personal expression. They also enjoy unprecedented wealth; these “spoiled children” or “pampered brats,” as they are called, have their own money to spend on clothes and entertainment.



Boy hairstyle, Tokyo © Elisa Leonelli

There is a short period in which young Japanese can enjoy an active social life, before their early twenties. After that, they become members of society, and are expected to take on responsibilities: the men get a job and the women get married.



Girl on bicycle, Tokyo © Elisa Leonelli

You may read the full text and see all the photos at [this link](#) as part of the [Elisa Leonelli, Photojournalist](#) collection at Claremont Colleges Library.

This entry was posted on Wednesday, July 27th, 2022 at 7:27 pm and is filed under [Photography](#), [Travel](#)

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