

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers visit <http://www.djreprints.com>.

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB122713804938242481>

WORLD

Japan's Latest Fashion Has Women Playing Princess for a Day

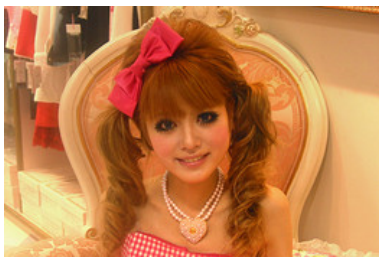
Part Marie Antoinette and Part Paris Hilton, The Style Affords Pricey Stress Relief

By Yukari Iwatani Kane and Lisa Thomas

Updated Nov. 20, 2008 11:59 p.m. ET

TOKYO -- When Mayumi Yamamoto goes out for coffee or window shopping, she likes to look as though she's going to a formal garden party. One day recently, she was decked out in a frilly, rose-patterned dress, matching pink heels with a ribbon and a huge pink bow atop her long hair, dyed brown and in pre-Raphaelite curls.

Ms. Yamamoto is a *hime gyaru*, or princess girl, a growing new tribe of Japanese women who aim to look like sugarcoated, 21st-century versions of old-style European royalty. They idolize Marie Antoinette and Paris Hilton, for her baby-doll looks and princess lifestyle. They speak in soft, chirpy voices and flock to specialized boutiques with names like Jesus Diamante, which looks like a bedroom in a European chateau. There, some hime girls spend more than \$1,000 for an outfit including a satin dress, parasol and rhinestone-studded handbag.



REGAL DRESS IN JAPAN

Scores of Japanese women are emulating Marie Antoinette and other old-style European royals through their fashion choices. [Click here to see a slideshow.](#)

"When they come out with a new item, I can't sleep at night because that's all I can think about," says Ms. Yamamoto of the Diamante dresses. The 36-year-old housewife has amassed a collection of 20 princess dresses in the past eight months and even decked out her bedroom with imitation rococo furniture.

Japan has been famous for its extreme fashion fads, mostly among teenagers. These have ranged from the Lolita look, in which women dress up in baby-doll dresses and bonnets, to a tough-girl look called *Yamamba*, or mountain hag, which requires a dark tan, white eye shadow and shaggy, silver-bleached hair.

But the princess boom is seen as a more polished and sophisticated look that's popular among working women in their 20s and 30s, perhaps as a bit of escapism from workaday stress and economic uncertainty.

"There's a longing for a happy-ending fairy tale," says Asuka Watanabe, a sociology professor at Kyoritsu Women's Junior College, who specializes in street fashion.

While it may be in style among fashionable women in New York and London, black isn't an option for hime girls, who prefer pink and florals. They also have a doll-like sense of beauty that requires effort and practice to attain. To create the ideal "supervolume hair," curl only a few strands of hair at a time and alternate between inward and outward curls, advises *Vanilla Girl*, a fashion magazine for teenagers aspiring to become hime girls. Dyed hair extensions can help form more dynamic ringlets, while mascara applied on top of fake eyelashes plus black liquid eyeliner can really accentuate the eyes.

The princess boom has also taken off among an unlikely group of women: nightclub hostesses who also like the big-hair, glamorous look, though their dresses are often more revealing.

Jesus Diamante started the princess boom. Toyotaka Miyamae, 52, who had run an import shop specializing in evening gowns, set up the company in Osaka seven years ago to design feminine dresses tailored to Japanese women, whom he found to be shorter and to have smaller chests than Western women. Inspired by his favorite actress, Brigitte Bardot, he created dresses in quality fabrics that mimicked the feminine and elegant style of her youth.

"What I wanted to do wasn't that unique," says Mr. Miyamae, who named the company after a Japanese musical. "I just made them to fit Japanese bodies."

Mr. Miyamae's knee-length dresses are studded with fake pearls and flowers and have names like Antoine (short for Marie Antoinette). They became popular among women who were looking for a cleaned-up look after the popularity of ripped jeans and layered casual clothing in the late 1990s. The chain's sales have grown 20% a year, to \$13.4 million in the year ended March 2008, even though it has just four stores, including one in Tokyo's trendy Harajuku neighborhood. It has spurred a slew of rivals with names like Liz Lisa and La Pafait.

Mr. Miyamae has also hired some loyal customers as shop clerks, who spent time experimenting with makeup and hairstyles to go with the clothes, eventually coming up with the doe-eyed princess look. Diamante started stocking its own interpretation of regal-looking accessories, such as tiaras, elbow-length gloves and stiletto-heeled slippers adorned with ribbons.

Keiko Mizoe, Jesus Diamante's top sales clerk and a former customer, says she sees the princess style as one befitting an elegant woman from an upper-class family. The girls are "perfect, gorgeous and feminine," says the 24-year-old, herself dressed in a red checkered dress, pink stockings in heart patterns and pink nails studded with crystals.

Ms. Mizoe, who the company says single-handedly sells about \$95,000 in clothing each month, has become an idol among Diamante customers, who try to imitate everything about her. On the store's Web site, she keeps a regularly updated blog, in which she lists her favorite food (Godiva's heart-shaped chocolates), favorite drink (cocoa at Tokyo Disneyland) and favorite expression (thank you).

Haruka Oohira, a 16-year-old hime girl, was so in awe of sales clerks like Ms. Mizoe that she made a flurry of purchases online before feeling confident enough to set foot in the Harajuku store. "Their cuteness is beyond human," says Ms. Oohira. "I'd like to be like them."

Of course, princess fashion isn't exactly practical. Ms. Yamamoto, the housewife princess, says she gave up wearing the frilly dresses while she works opening cardboard boxes at an accessory store four hours a day.

Ms. Yamamoto says she has long adored pink and wanted to dress in feminine clothes, but felt shy about her plump figure. After losing about 33 pounds in recent years, she got hooked on Diamante's tight-waisted dresses adorned with huge rose patterns, and estimates she may be spending \$2,000 or \$3,000 a month. Her husband, an architect who loves Europe, pays for most of her purchases. Her parents, who live nearby, send the couple food so they have more money for Ms. Yamamoto's shopping sprees.

"I figure it's OK as long as what I'm buying is pretty," she says.

—Miho Inada contributed to this article.

Write to Yukari Iwatani Kane at yukari.iwatani@wsj.com and Lisa Thomas at lisa.thomas@wsj.com

