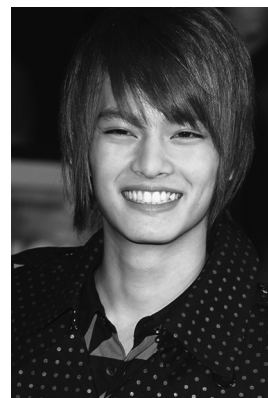


### Genderless model Nakayama

adapted from an article by Matthew Hernon

- 1 With the encouragement of her mother, Satsuki Nakayama began modeling when she was just 12 years old. Her first break came with a shoot for *Pichi Lemon*, a style magazine for girls. She loved wearing dresses, she loved her long hair — but that changed when she caught a glimpse of a Korean model named Kaito on a fashion brand website. “I just assumed he was a guy,” the 19-year-old says.
- 2 “Finding out she was a girl came as a bit of a shock, but it wasn’t an awkward surprise or anything. I just thought she was really cool and suddenly wanted to look like that myself,” Nakayama recalls. “That week I threw out my skirts and got my hair cut short. I immediately felt liberated — it was great.”
- 3 Her management was concerned she’d lose out on opportunities. “I was just a junior high school student so I wasn’t thinking about my career at all,” Nakayama says. “It was how I wanted to look and that was it. For about 12 months, work did dry up a little, but over the past couple of years things have gone in the opposite direction. I’m often chosen by companies because my style is a bit different to that of other Japanese models. I was labelled with this tag of being a ‘genderless’ or ‘androgynous’ girl early on and it has stuck. I don’t mind at all. In fact, I like it.”
- 4 Androgyny is 25. Fashion model Twiggy caused a craze in Britain during the 1960s when she cut her hair short, and David Bowie’s androgynous style was a major influence on pop culture. Recently, thanks to a more open way of thinking when it comes to gender fluidity, androgynous models have been major hits on the catwalk — from Andreja Pejic to Rain Dove.
- 5 “There aren’t as many genderless female models in Japan as there are in say Europe or America, and that has helped to open doors for me,” Nakayama says. “That said, I have still been surprised by the interest. My Twitter and Instagram account followers just exploded and I’ve been getting quite a few comments from abroad, which usually require translation software from my end (laughs). People stop me in the street and I’ve sat next to people on trains who’ve said they recognized me. It feels strange getting noticed in public, but I can’t say I don’t enjoy it.”



- 6 Though she tends to present a somewhat mysterious visage in her photo shoots, Nakayama is bright and bubbly in person. Like many of her peers, she says she loves Disney and karaoke. “A lot of photographers are quite surprised when they meet me for the first time,” she says. “I guess they are expecting a moody adolescent who doesn’t speak and could be difficult, but I’m not like that at all. I’m a positive person who always goes into work in a cheerful mood because I love what I do.”
  
- 7 You might argue that Nakayama was able to stumble into her current career thanks to good timing. After all, androgyny is fashionable in a big way. Speaking with her, however, it’s her confidence that really makes her stand out. “The androgynous look has been great for my career, but what’s more important than that is the fact that I feel comfortable,” she says. “Fashion is something to enjoy. It’s about finding your own style rather than following trends. I hope we see more young people in the future doing their own thing and not worrying about what others might think.”

*japantimes.co, 2017*