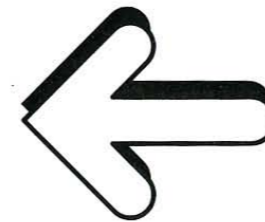
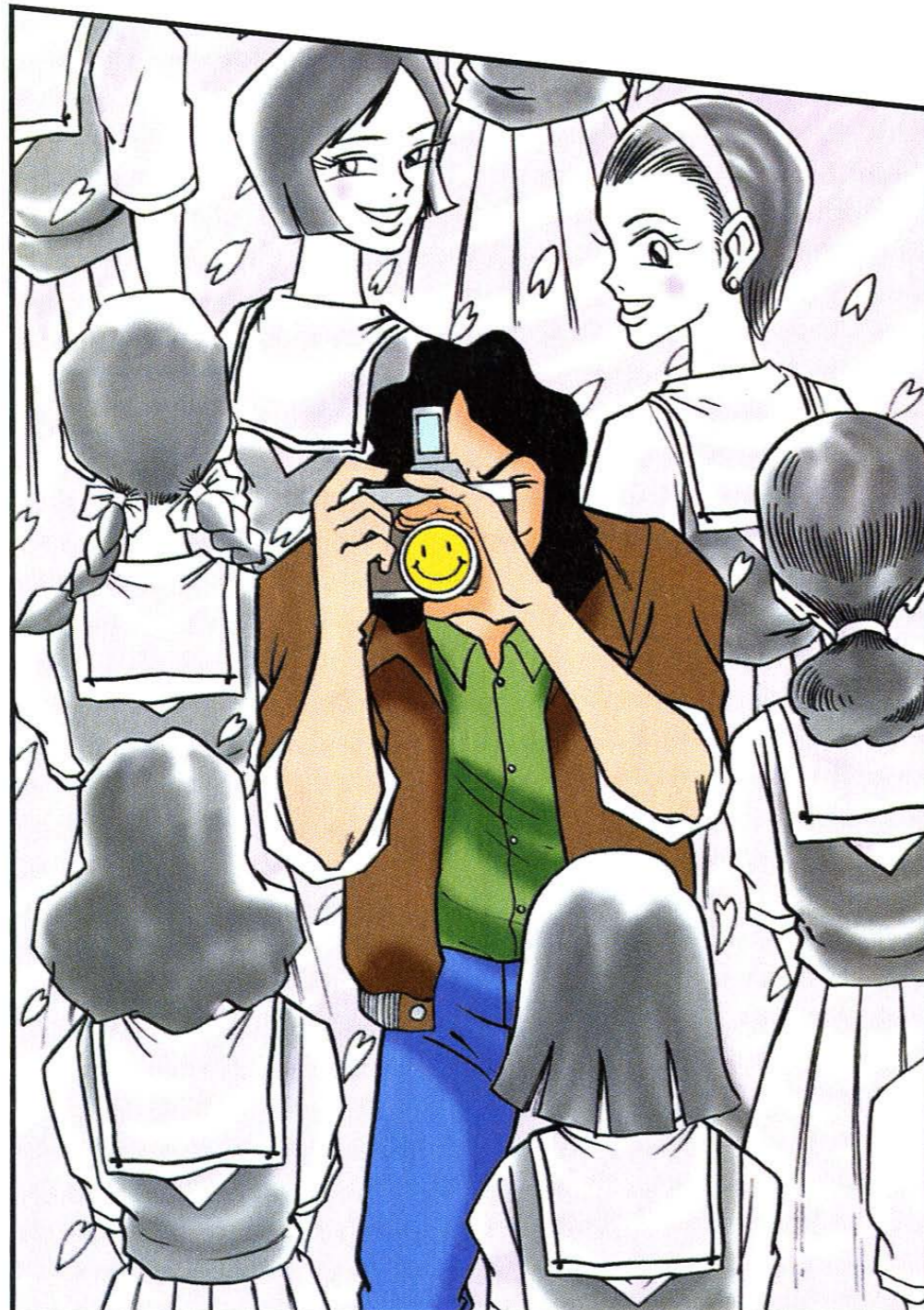


Time Out

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PHOTOGRAPHY KOJI MIZUTANI

If a decade of recession has ground down the Japanese psyche, photographer Koji Mizutani has found the ultimate pick-me-up. His 'Merry' project, first an exhibition and now a best-selling book, is a collection of colourful snapshots of brightly smiling teenage girls out and about in Tokyo's buzzing Harajuku area. The girls express optimism and individuality through their unique fashion sense and notes from each one on what makes her happy (above).

'Because of the recession, Japanese people are very down,' says Mizutani. 'They don't have any hope. I was seeking a way to encourage people to lead a lighter way of life because people are very negative at the moment. I wanted to do something positive.'

'Many people in Tokyo lost their way during the '90s. But I found the younger generation have different energy. People often say the Japanese never laugh or always imitate, but I find this younger generation totally different. Now is the time to change generation. Younger people are taking over to make things happen in Japan. I was worrying about the future of Japan, but after meeting these thousands of girls, I thought: Japan will be okay.'

Mizutani has recently been in London giving our street life a similar treatment, though with less colourful results, to be exhibited at Harajuku department store Laforet during May. *JCT 'Merry' is showing at Selfridges as part of the 'Tokyo Life' season, May 1-31 (www.21Merry.net).*