

## **Reflections on Twentieth-Century Kimono Across Temporal and Geographic Borders**

**Terry Satsuki Milhaupt**

May 2012

### Project Summary:

This report consolidates observations made about textual, textural, and visual material related to “kimono culture in the twentieth century,” our research group’s operating topic for the past three years. The first section of this report describes the theoretical models employed in my study, and the second section applies these synthesized approaches to specific objects, or groups of objects, alluding to potential lines of inquiry for future projects.

Praised by Japanese and foreigners alike for the beauty of its craftsmanship and the elegance of those who wear it, the kimono today circulates in a global context with multiple uses, values, and meanings. Imbued today with the scent of “traditional” Japan, the kimono’s functions are multifaceted: as a garment, as an object of crafted art, and no less significant, as an icon. Within and across each of these categories, the kimono’s meaning shifts as it traverses geographic and temporal borders, depending on the context of its use and the perspective from which it is viewed. The object itself remains unchanged. What changes is how the kimono is deployed by its user and perceived by its viewer when situated in a specific time and place.

My report focuses on the trajectories of kimono from both the users’ and viewers’ perspectives, inside and outside of Japan, over the last 100 years. By reflecting on the kimono’s function and meaning in an “internationally contemporaneous context,” we can better understand how this simple T-shaped garment with flowing sleeves and vertical panels draped from the wearer’s shoulders came to embody Japan, familiar and foreign, real and romanticized. More specifically, my research focuses on how the kimono’s function evolved from an everyday garment into an object for display in art and craft exhibitions, and in the process was reified as an icon of Japanese culture.

## 20世紀の「きもの」—時間と空間の境界を越えて—

テリ・五月・ミルハプト

### 要 旨

我々のグループは過去3年間、「20世紀の「きもの」文化」というテーマに取り組んできたが、その中で、本報告は、「20世紀の「きもの」文化」に関する、文字資料、実物資料、視覚資料についての調査結果を集約したものである。第1部では本研究の理論的枠組みについて述べ、第2部ではそれを応用して、特定、または一連の作品にアプローチし、最後に、将来の研究プロジェクトの可能性についても示唆する。

「きもの」は今日、その工芸美と着た姿の優雅さを日本人にも外国人にも称賛され、さまざまな使い方、さまざまな価値、さまざまな意味を担って世界中を流通している。「伝統的」な日本の香りを染み込まされた今日の「きもの」の役割は多方面に渡る。すなわち、衣服として、工芸作品として、そして、それらに劣らず重要なのが、アイコンとして、である。これらのカテゴリーのなかで、また、それらのカテゴリーをまたいで、「きもの」の意味は、「きもの」が使われるコンテキストと「きもの」が見られるパースペクティブに応じて、地理的、時間的境界を横切るたびに変化する。モノとしての「きもの」自体が変化しているわけではない。変化しているのは、「きもの」が特定の時と場所に置かれた際に、着る人がどのように使うのか、見る人がどのように理解するのか、なのである。

本報告書は、この100年のあいだに、日本の国内外の着る人と見る人双方にとって、「きもの」がどのような軌跡を描いてきたのかということについて焦点を当てている。「世界的同時代性」というコンテキストにおいて「きもの」の役割と意味を考えることにより、私たちは、翻る袖と、着る人の肩からドレープを描いて垂直に垂れ下がるパネルを持つ、このシンプルなT字型の衣服が、どのような過程を経て「日本」を表現するようになったのかをよりよく理解することができる。その「日本」とは、ある人にとってはよく知っている現実の国であり、また別の人にとっては見知らぬ空想の国である。さらに本研究では、「きもの」がどのようにして日常着から美術工芸の展覧会で展示される作品へと発展したのか、そしてその過程で、どのようにして日本文化のアイコンとして具体化していったのか、ということにも焦点を当てる。

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This report consolidates observations made about textual, textural, and visual material related to “kimono culture in the twentieth century,” our research group’s operating topic for the past three years. At the outset, we were interested in what we would learn if a group of researchers from varied academic fields focused their analytical skills and intellectual frames of reference collaboratively on certain types of objects, in the domain of kimono, broadly defined. Our intentionally international research team included two Japanese scholars—Mori Rie, a cultural historian whose research focuses on fashion, colonialism, and gender studies, and Keiko Suzuki, a cultural anthropologist whose research focuses on representations of the “Other,” as well as two Americans, Sarah Frederick, a scholar of modern Japanese literature who specializes in women’s magazines and female writers, and myself, an art historian who specializes in Japanese cloth and clothing history—all of us conversant in both English and Japanese. How, we wondered, would disciplinary training, nationality, and our personally honed ways of seeing affect what types of material we would initially seek out, and the types of questions we would ask? How would we interpret texts and images, and how would we position our findings about the material? The first section of this report describes the theoretical models employed in my study, and the second section applies these synthesized approaches to specific objects, or groups of objects, alluding to potential lines of inquiry for future projects.

Our initial proposal cast our collective research net widely:

Throughout the twentieth century, the production, distribution, and consumption of Japanese kimono underwent tremendous changes as the Japanese nation made efforts to be perceived as modern and international. By focusing on its material form as well as representations of kimono in texts and images both within Japan and beyond its borders, this research group intends to reveal how shifts in the design and use of the physical garment and its representation in multiple media throughout this one-hundred-year span were intimately tied to the Japanese nation's evolving status in a dynamic global setting.

We targeted twentieth-century kimono because as a research topic it appeared to be relatively uncharted territory. Little did we realize that ferreting out objects for study would prove both exciting and frustrating. Exciting because many of the objects we examined in museum and library collections had not been previously requested for examination; we were often the first to view them since the objects were acquired. Frustrating because many of the objects we were interested in examining fell into the interstitial geographic spaces and object type lacunae of digitized museum cataloguing systems. Where, for example, does a museum store a kimono made for export? In the Asian department since it was likely produced in Japan? In the European

department since that is where the kimono was purchased and ultimately used? And how does one catalog this garment? Nomenclature, provenance, and cultural identity can improve or impede the historian's efforts to learn more about an object. As the historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich noted in her book on the significance of objects in early America, "connecting written documents to artifacts is never easy, especially when nomenclature is inconsistent," or when a curator accessioning an object may selectively omit certain types of information. She also observes that women's property, in particular, tends to be "movable" and its transfer from one generation to the next is not always recorded in legal or public documents as it might be with men's property.<sup>1</sup> So even once an object suitable for further study is identified, the work of documenting who made it and when, who owned it and why, or who used it and how, just begins.

The impulse to know more about this fascinating period of one hundred years from 1900 through 2000 was tempered by the recognition that the research would constitute a preliminary investigation, and likely remain as such for many years to come. The Japanese literature scholar J. Thomas Rimer, in his "Introduction" to *Since Meiji: Perspectives on the Japanese Visual Arts, 1868-2000*, presciently observed that:

The desire to create a theoretical model into which the history of Japanese art since the beginning of the Meiji period in 1868 can be placed is understandable, yet at this point such desire may well represent a 'subtle corruption,' since any system would of necessity impose itself on a mass of complex historical and artistic facts, a relatively large number of which as yet remain too little researched and understood. The time to write that history may come, but before then, much more needs to be known.<sup>2</sup>

The same could be said for the history of kimono in the twentieth century. So rather than establishing a "theoretical model into which the history of Japanese [kimono] since the beginning of the Meiji period in 1868 can be placed," this report makes transparent my personal attempt to elucidate this body of material by highlighting certain objects that most intrigue me and how they might illuminate the larger story of kimono culture in the twentieth century.

Questions of how to begin to capture the plethora of information available and how to organize the information prompted vexing questions. While categories are useful for organizing large quantities of information, they can also obscure relevant data, or a holistic vision of a culture or period. In his effort to position modern Japanese art within a broader spatial-temporal context, Satô Dôshin has constructed a "flower illustration" with extending petals representing the spectrum from "Asia" to the "West" across a horizontal axis and the "Ancient period/Medieval period/Early modern period" to the "Present" on a vertical axis, with "Modern Japan" at its center.<sup>3</sup> As a goal of his study, Satô states: "my aim is to obtain a bird's-eye view of the relatedness and totality of art, the history of art, and the discipline of art history in modern Japanese art, all of which are situated on the aforementioned axes of geography and time."<sup>4</sup> While my study is less ambitious in scope, it likewise attempts to look at the entire landscape across which kimono has circulated; not just individual kimono produced and consumed in Japan, nor simply the group of objects referred to as "kimono" and the related objects that surrounded them, but how and why these objects were produced, how global demand shaped their appearance, how and why they transgressed Japan's

borders, and how they were used and understood when they appeared in cultural contexts different from that of their original site of production.

In this study, therefore, I promote extinguishing existing arbitrary dichotomies and taxonomies—traditional/modern, pre-/post-WWII, center/periphery, art/craft, high/low, art/anthropology, sacred/secular, center/periphery, urban/rural, global/local, Asia/West with Japan positioned somewhere betwixt. Needless to say, this is a challenging task, but if at least attempted, it opens up new vistas for investigation. Japanese art historian Reiko Tomii's outlook on the study of 'contemporary art' and its history serves as one possible way to envision the history of Japanese textiles, clothing, and fashion of the modern era and beyond. In the introduction to her essay on 1960s art discourse in Japan, Tomii notes that: "more than a compendium of local and/or national art histories, 'world art history' in [Tomii's] definition is a networked whole of local/national histories linked through resonances and connections. The connectedness is both explicit and implicit, underscored by the idea of 'international contemporaneity.'" Tomii goes on to point out that "ultimately, the study of 'contemporaneity' helps us to suspend—if not outright dismantle—the omniscient single perspective (which is more often than not Eurocentric) that we, art historians or not, are consciously or unconsciously accustomed to assume. Only by doing so, can 'multiplicity'—or more precisely, 'multiple perspectives'—be injected into art-historical discourses, and the horizon of world art history expanded."<sup>5</sup> This study of kimono culture in the twentieth century endeavors to expose multiplicity, rather than univocality.

Praised by Japanese and foreigners alike for the beauty of its craftsmanship and the elegance of those who wear it, the kimono today circulates in a global context with multiple uses, values, and meanings. Imbued today with the scent of "traditional" Japan, the kimono's functions are multifaceted: as a garment, as an object of crafted art, and no less significant, as an icon. Within and across each of these categories, the kimono's meaning shifts as it traverses geographic and temporal borders, depending on the context of its use and the perspective from which it is viewed. The object itself remains unchanged. What changes is how the kimono is deployed by its user and perceived by its viewer when situated in a specific time and place. My report focuses on the trajectories of kimono from both the users' and viewers' perspectives, inside and outside of Japan, over the last 100 years. By reflecting on the kimono's function and meaning in an "internationally contemporaneous context," we can better understand how this simple T-shaped garment with flowing sleeves and vertical panels draped from the wearer's shoulders came to embody Japan, familiar and foreign, real and romanticized. More specifically, my research focuses on how the kimono's function evolved from an everyday garment into an object for display in art and craft exhibitions, and in the process was reified as an icon of Japanese culture.

At this stage, my report attempts to frame a broader outlook by building on two strands of existing scholarship about modern kimono. Historians of Japanese costume and textiles have begun to extend their scholarship beyond the mid-nineteenth century to include kimono of the Meiji (1868-1911), Taishō (1911-1926), and early Shōwa (1926-1989) eras. Yet post-Edo (1615-1868) textile and clothing history remains understudied, perhaps because it is still too close to our own lifetimes to establish the temporal distance necessary for critical evaluation. The kimono's impact outside of Japan, or what has come to be termed "Japonisme in fashion," has been better documented. Yet, scholarship in this arena tends to focus more on European, British, and American clothing inspired

by Japanese textiles, motifs, and clothing construction methods, and less on the actual Japanese sources and materials for that inspiration. These lenses also delineate and distill the amorphous categories of “Japan” and “West,” and juxtapose them as binaries rather than seeing them as mutually integrated in overlapping spheres of production, marketing, consumption, with primary and subsequent usages and meanings.<sup>6</sup>

My research ricochets in the interstices between the “kimono in Japan” and the “kimono in the West.” My methodology synthesizes two analytical models adapted from anthropological studies, namely Arjun Appadurai’s and Igor Kopytoff’s method that follows the forms and trajectories of a thing-in-motion in order to understand the political and economic matrix underlying its production, use, and consumption.<sup>7</sup> Kopytoff’s model traces the biography of individual objects as well as the social history of the group of objects to which an individual thing belongs to track the paths and diversions in its life. Appadurai distinguishes between the “cultural biography of a thing” and “the social history of things” noting that “[t]he differences have to do with two kinds of temporality, two forms of class identity, and two levels of social scale. The cultural biography perspective, formulated by Kopytoff, is appropriate to *specific* things, as they move through different hands, contexts, and uses, thus accumulating a specific biography, or set of biographies. When we look at classes or types of thing, however, it is important to look at longer-term shifts (often in demand) and larger-scale dynamics that transcend the biographies of particular members of that class or type.”<sup>8</sup> My approach considers both the individual biographies of a kimono and the collective social lives of kimono as an object type in order to gain valuable insights into its production, consumption, use, and value.

This study privileges the “how” of an object, and then investigates “why,” at various stages in an object’s life. Understanding the materiality of the object itself—“how” it was made—is knowledge obtained only by looking and continuing to look at actual objects, of as many types as possible, and this then is a prerequisite to beginning to hypothesize about “why” something looks the way it does. Investigating “how” an object was marketed or consumed aids in our appreciation of interpreting “why” it might have been perceived in certain ways. When we consider how an object was produced, consumed, valued, and reused, we are reminded by Appadurai that as Georg Simmel stated in 1907: “value...is never an inherent property of the objects, but is a judgment made about them by subjects.”<sup>9</sup> Our interpretation of an object’s values, whether historical, aesthetic, economic, or some combination, hinges upon our knowledge about objects of that type and their production, consumption, and use contexts. Appadurai observes that the distribution of knowledge about objects can be broadly categorized into two types: ‘the knowledge (technical, social, aesthetic, and so forth) that goes into the production of the commodity; and the knowledge that goes into appropriately consuming the commodity. The production knowledge that *is read into* a commodity is quite different from the consumption knowledge that is *read from* the commodity” (italics mine) and “these two readings will diverge proportionately as the social, spatial, and temporal distance between producers and consumers increases.”<sup>10</sup> Thus, when we follow the trajectories of objects, or groups of objects, particularly those that cross cultural or temporal borders or are transacted through traders or intermediary agents, it is essential to remember that “such careers have the greatest uniformity at the production pole; for it is likely that at the moment of production, the commodity in question has had the least opportunity to accumulate an idiosyncratic biography or enjoy a peculiar

career.”<sup>11</sup> Moreover, when the producer is unfamiliar or unaware of the consumers’ desires or interest in a product, or imagines the consumers’ wishes as interpreted by an intermediary, the ultimate function and meaning of the object in the new context in which it is acquired may diverge in large measure from its producers’ intended meaning and use. The further the spatial-temporal distance between production and consumption (primary, secondary, etc.), the more likely the object accrues a distinctive story.

Appadurai is also concerned with “commodities and the politics of value,” and more recently with what he terms “modernity at large.”<sup>12</sup> Appadurai clearly states that “[i]mplicit in [his] book is a theory of rupture that takes media and migration as its two major, and interconnected, diacritics and explores their joint effect on the *work of the imagination* [emphasis his] as a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity.” He goes on to explain that “[t]his theory of a break—or rupture—with its strong emphasis on electronic mediation and mass migration, is necessarily a theory of the recent past (or the extended present) because it is only in the past two decades or so that media and migration have become so massively globalized, that is to say, active across large and irregular transnational terrains.”<sup>13</sup> Kopytoff aptly notes that “[b]iographies of things can make salient what might otherwise remain obscure,” and more importantly, as this study reveals, “in situations of cultural contact, they can show...that what is significant about the adoption of alien objects—as of alien ideas—is not the fact that they are adopted, but the way they are culturally redefined and put to use.”<sup>14</sup>

Drawing on Kopytoff’s and Appadurai’s models, for this paper I have selected a few kimono and related objects and considered their trajectories as they circulate across geographic and temporal borders throughout the twentieth century, either as physical objects or as images that incorporate kimono as their subject. At this stage, my report attempts to outline how the resulting amalgam that melds elements of these multiple refractions reveals more than if viewed in static isolation. As mass migration and media continually obfuscate cultural borders, will the distinctions between East and West, traditional and modern continue to erode? Or instead, in reaction, will there be a desire to retreat to more local, familiar enclaves in order to avert globalization? How has the meaning and function of the kimono—as garment, as object of crafted art, and as icon—evolved and shifted over time and across geographical borders, and what do these changes reveal about the cultures who produce, market, consume, and value them?

To begin simply, the kimono is a garment.<sup>15</sup> The word kimono is an abbreviation of the Japanese word *ki(ru)mono* which literally translates into English as “thing to wear.” Until at least the mid-1950s in Japan, the word kimono referred both to Japanese-style garments of all types and Western-style clothing. Current interpretations of the word *kimono*, now part of the international lexicon and defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as a “long, loose Japanese robe worn with a sash,” or “similar dressing gown,” were shaped during the span of one hundred years, 1850 to 1950. The appellation “kimono” derives from its current definition in the modern era. Prior to the increasing awareness of Western-style clothing in Japan that became apparent from the 1850s, most Japanese referred to individual garments by specific terms. For centuries, a variant of the T-shaped kimono was commonly worn in Japan, but then it was referred to as a *kosode*, literally a garment with small-sleeve openings. But the *kosode*, the prototype of the modern kimono, was only one of myriad sartorial choices worn by both men and women. In pre-modern Japan, age, gender, social

status, and the occasion determined the type of garment to be worn, its materials, and its decorative patterning. Various types of T-shaped garments were cut from a single bolt into seven pieces—two body panels, two sleeve panels, two front overlaps, and a collar—and their straight edges were sewn together. Each garment type bore its own name, depending on its sleeve length, function, and the materials selected for its design. Today, however, most of these distinct garments are subsumed under the single rubric of “kimono.”

In response to the influx of Western-style clothing to Japan in the mid-nineteenth century, the Japanese first recognized the significance of their distinctive mode of dress, and it was from this time that the categories of either Western-style clothing (*yōfuku*) or Japanese-style clothing (*wafuku*) gained prominence. Among *wafuku*, the term kimono gained currency, particularly outside of Japan’s borders, to refer to this distinctively Japanese-style garment. Over the course of its usage, the word *kimono* itself circulated within the Japanese lexicon in variant writing styles: in *kanji* (Chinese characters), in *hiragana* (the phonetic syllabary usually reserved for Japanese words), in *katakana* (the phonetic syllabary usually used for words of foreign origin), and in its Romanized version as kimono. Actual kimono, together with the shifting meanings of the word itself, chronicle cultural developments, reflect shifts in aesthetic tastes, and denote social identities. As such, the kimono and its meaning changes with the times—and it is anything but “traditional.”<sup>16</sup>

In 1868, the military mantle of the Tokugawa regime was stowed away and bureaucrats of the new Meiji government called for a more “civilized and enlightened” society. In their attempt to bring Japan in line with Western nations, officials began to appear in what was then termed “Western-style clothing,” as distinguished from Japanese-style clothing. The Meiji Emperor first appeared in a Western-style uniform as early as 1872, only four years after the official shift to a centralized government with the emperor as its tutelary head. From this moment on, the kimono became less recognizable as a distinguishing mark of social status or occupation, but was increasingly identified with Japan as a nation with the kimono paraded as its national dress. Japanese, who until this time identified with a particular socioeconomic stratum (aristocrat, samurai, farmer, artisan, or merchant) began to increasingly recognize themselves as members of a more universal social group representing an emergent national, rather than class- or domain-based, identity.

On January 17, 1887, a decree issued by the Meiji government encouraged women of Japan to adopt Western modes of dress as the Empress herself had done the previous year.<sup>17</sup> This was an opportunity, seemingly encouraged by Imperial edict, for women also to jettison the kimono. And yet, neither men nor women did so altogether. A profound change transpired with men’s sartorial choices. In public or official appearances, men donned Western-style suits and uniforms. In the privacy of their homes and for informal occasions, however, the kimono was their garment of choice. The velocity of change witnessed in men’s clothing habits was quite palpable, as evidenced in woodblock prints of men predominantly wearing Western-style clothing. Women, however, were slower to adopt the bustles and corsets popular in Europe and America at the time. The kimono retained its currency among Japanese women, albeit with significant changes in its attendant and intended meanings.

In Japan today, the kimono is worn, if at all, primarily by women for formal occasions such as the “coming-of-age ceremony,” weddings, and funerals, for informal occasions such as shopping

and dining out with friends or for entertaining. In some of these situations, kimono might actually be thought of as an “other” form of clothing since most Japanese today wear what is termed *yôfuku*, or “Western-style clothing.” Kimono is also worn as a costume by performers and entertainers, most notably the *maikô* of Kyoto. In the vague realms between clothing and costume lie those who wear kimono to practice “traditional” Japanese arts such as tea ceremony or flower arrangement.

At the other extreme, the kimono today is used and viewed as a work of art; collected and displayed at exhibitions both inside and outside of Japan. Kimono exhibited in art museums highlight the virtuosity of the craftspeople involved in their making, and the aesthetic tastes of the people who might have worn them during a particular era, thereby allowing the viewer a glimpse into the past. Contemporary Japanese viewers of Edo, Meiji, Taishô, or Shôwa era kimono may have a more familiar vantage point from which to view these objects, and yet, the “past is a foreign country,”<sup>18</sup> to Japanese and non-Japanese alike. In other words, the meaning of these iconic garments shifts depending on the viewers’ cultural, generational, and social identity, and as each of these factors change over time.

Whether the kimono functions as a garment, as an object of crafted art, or as an icon of Japan, it is often viewed today as a symbol of a “traditional,” eternal Japan. And yet, as this paper demonstrates, depending on its cultural and temporal context, the meaning of the kimono shifts and is contingent upon the user’s *and* viewer’s perspectives. In Japan of the Edo period, for example, the garment known as an *uchikake*—a formal, padded, outer robe—was reserved primarily for use by women of the military class. Made of a figured silk fabric, embellished with decorative embroidery and patterned dyeing with a combination of motifs such as wisteria, fans, and cherry blossoms, this garment was worn as the uppermost layer of an ensemble of formal robes.

Outside of Japan, kimono of all types, including *uchikake*, were highly coveted as garments and as collectibles in British and European markets during the Japan craze of the 1860s and 1870s, as documented in written sources and paintings. For example, in 1864, James Tissot (1836-1902) completed the painting entitled *Japonaise au bain*. In Tissot’s painting, a Caucasian woman emerges from the bath, seductively clad in a very realistic rendition of an *uchikake*. In Japan, as previously mentioned, a garment similar to the *uchikake* depicted in Tissot’s painting was worn primarily by Japanese women of the military class for formal occasions, but never as a bathrobe. In Tissot’s painting, the combined effect of the kimono serving as a bathrobe with the woman being partially unclothed, positions the kimono in an exotic-erotic setting.

In 1882, August Renoir (1841-1919) painted the portrait of Madame Heriot. In Renoir’s painting, the sitter wears what appears to be an *uchikake* over a high-necked, concealing red blouse, belted at the waist with a gold buckle. In this painting, the kimono appears to represent an accouterment of a well-traveled, affluent woman and signals exotic, but not erotic. In the late nineteenth century, a Japanese woman from the Nabeshima family had a bustle-style dress produced from fabric traditionally used to make an *uchikake*. In these three examples, a kimono fabric conventionally produced in Japan and used for formal robes of Japanese women of the military class, was recontextualized by global consumers: as an erotic bath robe, an exotic dressing gown, and a formal bustle dress. The increased cultural distance from the initial site of production of fabric for *uchikake*, and the multiple subsequent uses of garments made from this fabric, may have contributed

to the distinctive social lives acquired by these three garments and the meanings they evoked for both their user and the viewer.

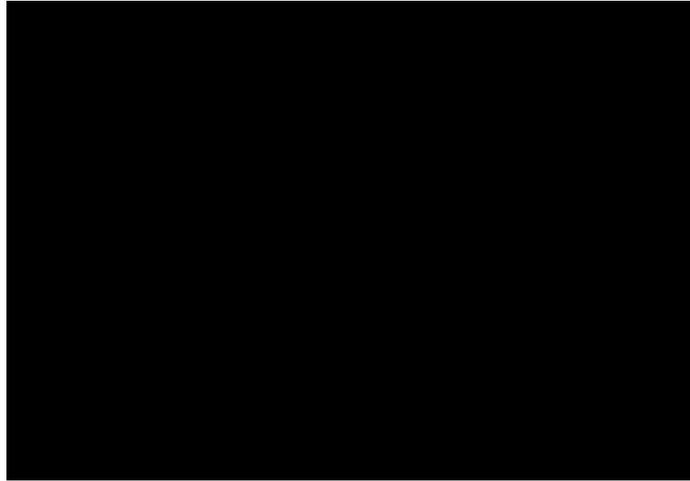
Japanese kimono were also appreciated for their technical virtuosity, migrating into overseas collections in the form of rolls of fabric. A roll of crepe silk *chirimen* fabric decorated with blossoms and fences was displayed at the Paris Exposition in 1867, from where it was purchased by the Victoria & Albert Museum in London.<sup>19</sup> In this case, documentary evidence about the acquisition of this roll of fabric by the museum provides us with a singular example of what type of fabric was produced in Japan and exhibited for global consumption in 1867, as well as its continued appreciation as an object of display in a museum setting.

Kimono also migrated from Japan to England through merchants such as Liberty & Co., founded by Arthur Lasenby Liberty in 1875. Again, documents record that a *kosode* (forerunner of the kimono) was likely produced in Japan in the 1860s through 1890s, and in 1891, it was purchased from Liberty & Co. by the Victoria and Albert Museum.<sup>20</sup> In this case, the original garment appears to have been produced for the Japanese market, but was purchased by an intermediary agent (Liberty & Co.), and ultimately now resides in a museum in London. As Akiko Fukai's and Suô Tamami's multi-faceted research on Japonisme in fashion has demonstrated, Liberty of London also ordered "Japanese Silk-Dressing Gowns" to be manufactured in Japan and sold to their British customers.<sup>21</sup> These "Japanese silk-dressing gowns," which differ markedly in construction, materials, and decorative techniques from the previously mentioned *kosode* purchased by Liberty & Co. and later acquired by the Victoria & Albert Museum, further complicated the meaning, use, and function of kimono outside of Japan.

Within Japan, Japanese manufacturers, such as Iida Shinshichi of Takashimaya, also capitalized on the international interest in Japanese silks. As Hirota Takashi's research on Takashimaya products has demonstrated, Takashimaya operated a store in Yokohama, where they sold kimono gowns, silks, and dresses of their own manufacture. These kimono gowns differed, however, in cut and construction from kimono intended for use in Japan, and even from those manufactured by British entities such as Liberty & Co.<sup>22</sup> For their export kimono, Takashimaya added insets to the sides of the garments thereby widening the skirt area, and also attached labels to the inside of their export kimono. Initially, the domestic and export kimono differed primarily in construction, labeling, and decorative techniques. A kimono with the "S. Iida Takashimaya" label, in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's collection, is made of paste-resist dyed (*yûzen*) silk crepe (*chirimen*), with additional panels inserted at each side seam to increase the skirt's flair. Perhaps not coincidentally, the materials, techniques, and colors employed to create the fabric for this kimono gown share certain technical qualities and a similar color palette with the previously described roll of cloth displayed in the 1867 Paris Exposition.

The construction and decorative motifs of maple leaves on a kimono gown, also from the LACMA collection, closely resemble a design (*zuan*) illustrated in a pattern book entitled "*Gaijin muke kimono zuan*" ("Kimono designs for foreigners). As Hirota's research has demonstrated, and as Keiko Suzuki's research in her report also describes, Takashimaya's kimono gowns for export came in various shapes. One type had inserts at their side seams, cording inserted at the sleeves' edges, and was typically decorated with embroidered motifs of wisteria, plum blossoms, butterflies, maple leaves, and other designs considered desirable to foreign women at that time. Extant kimono

gowns, and widely circulated advertisements for them, serve to document the existence of a market for gowns of specific types made exclusively for the export market. A 1909 sketch of the famous author, Virginia Woolf, in the British Museum's collection depicts her wearing a kimono gown over a dress, similar to the kimono gown in the Metropolitan Museum of Art Costume Institute's collection, suggesting the allure of kimono gowns to certain classes of women around the world.

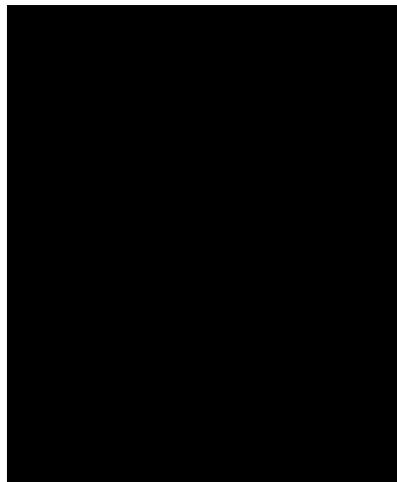


Vantine's: The Oriental Store, 1917 catalog advertising that  
"Vantine's kimonos are typically Japanese."

American retailers, such as A.A. Vantine, ordered kimono dressing gowns or tea gowns from Japan, affixed their own labels to the garment, and sold them in stores or through mail-order catalogs.<sup>23</sup> Catering to tastes among American female consumers, these gowns came with tassels at their sleeve edges, and matching fringed sashes. Although these kimono made for export generally fall outside of studies that concentrate on "Japanese kimono" or "European or American costume" and thus until recently have been ignored by the scholarly community, extant kimono provide strong evidence that by the early twentieth century, kimono produced for the export market differed markedly in cut, materials, motifs, and decorative techniques from kimono produced for domestic consumption.

If we focus on the domestic market in Japan, it is clear that the availability of Western-style clothing and accessories expanded clothing choices for the Japanese. A "New Game of Fashions for the Family" (*Shin-an katei ishō awase*) was tucked into the pages of Mitsukoshi store's 1910 in-house magazine. Profiles of family members aligned horizontally across the top of the page, read from right to left: husband, wife, grandfather, grandmother, young girl, young boy, baby, and maid. The "game" graphically categorized items suitable by gender and age for members of an urban, elite family that incorporated an amalgam of Japanese-style and Western-style items. Blending kimono with accessories imported from Europe, America, and England perfectly suited the more cosmopolitan flair of the times. Notably, Japanese-style garments intermingled with a few Western-style accessories predominate for females: mother, grandmother, the young girl, and the maid. For the men, clothing items and accessories favor Western-style dress. In other words, from the early twentieth century, the history of kimono in Japan became more closely tied to women's bodies and clothing history, than that of men's.

In Japan, age and gender often determined who wore kimono and who didn't. In a 1925 poster for Mitsukoshi department store, a woman with bobbed hair is simultaneously conventional in her kimono and up-to-date in her selection of Western-style accessories: a parasol and handbag. The little girl standing beside the woman, in contrast, is outfitted from head to toe in Western-style clothing, reflecting a choice of clothing style based on age rather than nationality. In 1925, the ethnographers Kon Wajirô (1888-1973), Yoshida Kenkichi (1897-?) and their assistants surveyed individual articles of clothing worn by men and women strolling through the Ginza, an activity referred to as Ginbura. Of the 1,180 people observed cruising the Ginza, 67% of the men wore Western clothing, while only 1% of women wore Western-style dress. In short, 99% of Japanese women observed in this 1925 survey still wore kimono or some form of Japanese clothing, indicating that by this moment in history in Japan, women were more likely to wear kimono than men.



Kon Wajirô's 1925 survey, published in *Fujin Kôron*

According to Kon's study, 51 percent of the women strolling the Ginza, furthermore, wore *meisen* kimono. *Meisen*, but one of many examples in which a type of fabric was recognized with a new name, represented a novel brand of merchandise for a new category of consumers. As women sought higher education in record numbers, the demand for uniforms for high school and college students created a market for inexpensive kimono with subdued, modest designs. *Meisen*, produced in the mountainous regions north of Tokyo, was all the rage in the early twentieth century, not only as part of a uniform among women attending universities, but also as affordable casual wear for women of a certain socio-economic status. *Meisen* is still produced today on a heavily reduced scale, primarily in an attempt to revive this technique that barely survived the disruptions of World War II. In contrast to the decreased production of *meisen* today, vintage *meisen* kimono are highly collectible both inside and outside of Japan. *Meisen* kimono have been featured in collectors' magazines, displayed in museum exhibitions, and worn on the streets.

The "social history" of *meisen* kimono demonstrates how a certain type of kimono worn as everyday wear for Japanese women in the early twentieth century was transformed into an object of art in the late twentieth century. The production of *meisen*, and most types of commercially available kimono fabric—in contrast to kimono woven, dyed, and sewn for personal use—

traditionally involved a number of artisans: stencil cutters, weavers, and dyers who specialized in a particular process whether ikat or stencil dyeing.<sup>24</sup> In short, the production of a single kimono depended upon a network of artisans who specialized in one stage of the production process. Today, the Arai family in Chichibu produces *meisen* under their brand name of Arakei, a contraction of the patriarch's family and given names. Current production of *meisen* continues to rely on the expertise of a network of artisans, albeit dwindling in number, but the final product is more closely identified with a brand, or in some cases a named designer.

In the 1910s, many artisans started to grapple with circumstances of anonymity and individuality, and engaged in debates about the distinguishing features of "craft" and "art." Given that concepts such as "fine art" and "decorative art" were imported into Japan beginning in the 1870s, and that distinctions among concepts such as "*mingei*: folk craft or people's crafts" and "commercial art" emerged in the mid-1920s, the terrain through which artists, designers, and craftspeople formulated their "designs" was indeed fraught with issues of how to self-identify in an increasingly complex artistic environment. Kimono producers, some formerly anonymous craftspeople, continued to toil at their given specialty in relative obscurity, but more and more, emergent kimono designers were marketed as individual makers whose products were sold under specific brands, or eventually under the designer's name.

Beginning in the mid-1930s there was a growing appreciation for individual kimono crafted by a single, named artisan. Showcasing an individual designer's achievements and emphasizing the originality of the piece over group production echoes the Western Romantic notion of the Artist with a capital "A." Similar trends materialized within the kimono design world. Some kimono designers, previously working as anonymous craftsmen, many laboring in workshops or under the direction of a producer responsible for coordinating the various stages of a kimono's production, became recognized as individual designers in their own right. The trading company Marubeni and major department stores sponsored kimono design competitions with winners being recognized by name. The Marubeni Collection also acquired kimono as in the example of a kimono designed by the artisan Imao Kazuo, the grandson of a "court-appointed artist" or *teishitsu gigein*.

The Japanese government also increasingly promoted the kimono as one of Japan's cultural treasures. In the 1936 Tourist Library book entitled *Kimono (Japanese Dress)*, written in English, and published by the Board of Tourist Industry and the Japanese Government Railways, the kimono is related more closely to the female, than the male's body. Kimono is discussed from the perspective of a fictional Parisian painter, Monsieur B, enamored with the kimono.<sup>25</sup> He claims:

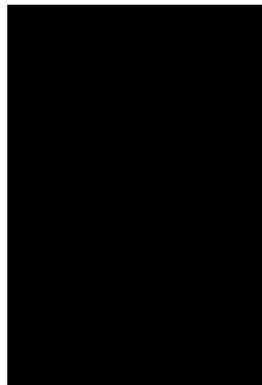
I do not know whether it was an Oriental vision depicted by the kimono itself or a lovely mirage engendered by the model wrapped in the kimono, or a reflection of the yearning for Japan burning in my heart. But through the graceful lines of the kimono, I had discovered a new life, a bewitching mystery, in the body.<sup>26</sup>

Monsieur B also describes the kimono as a "painting on canvas." Throughout this volume the Japanese male author's reliance on the narrative device of the imagined European male painter enables him to promote—ironically in a reflexive way—an Orientalized vision of the kimono. In essence, it is an example of self-orientalizing the kimono.



Illustration from Ken'ichi Kawakatsu, *Kimono: Japanese Dress*,  
published by the Board of Tourist Industry, Japanese Government Railways, 1936

During the 1930s, production of luxurious kimono and obi continued, despite the reality that Japan was engaged in what later became known as the Fifteen Year War (1931-1945). By the early 1940s, the Japanese government issued anti-luxury laws, and the kimono became one target of this wartime policy. Women were encouraged to refashion their old kimono into new looks, or to wear a two-piece set comprising a top with pants known as *monpe*. The government also encouraged female students to adopt a modified form of “protective gear,” comprising pants strapped tight around the ankles and a short jacket.



“Protective Gear,” 1944

In short, the kimono, particularly silk kimono with long-flowing sleeves, was singled out as impractical and too luxurious during the war years.

As Japan began its war recovery in the mid-1950s and into the 1960s, the kimono emerged with a new function. Kimono was no longer seen as everyday wear for the masses, as many Japanese became familiar with and began to prefer the clothing styles they observed of the Americans who occupied their country for seven years. Most strikingly, the kimono appeared primarily at ceremonial occasions and began to assume the position of embodying “traditional”

Japanese identity. The tension between preserving Japanese “tradition” while simultaneously appearing as modern and urbane as the citizens of Western nations intensified in the post World War II era, as Japan recovered from the humiliation of defeat at the hands of a Western power. The Cultural Properties Protection Committee established the first annual Japanese Traditional Craft Exhibition in 1955 in an effort to preserve traditional techniques of weaving and dyeing. Ironically, the struggle to protect and promote traditional crafts in an increasingly mechanized, urbanized, and Westernized world may eventually have stifled kimono designers’ vitality and viability. As designers sought to both create “one-of-a-kind” designs and preserve traditional techniques, the kimono evolved from an everyday garment into an expensive cultural relic.

As Western-style clothing increased in visibility and desirability in the cityscape, Japanese manufacturers marketed their cotton fabrics as appropriate for both Japanese-style *yukata*, as well as for western-style dresses. Kimono and *yukata* were even touted as suitable for non-Japanese, as displayed in this 1952 magazine layout in which Caucasian women modeling kimono surround the caption: “*Gaijin ga kimono wo kite mo konna ni niau*” (Kimono suits even foreigners quite well).

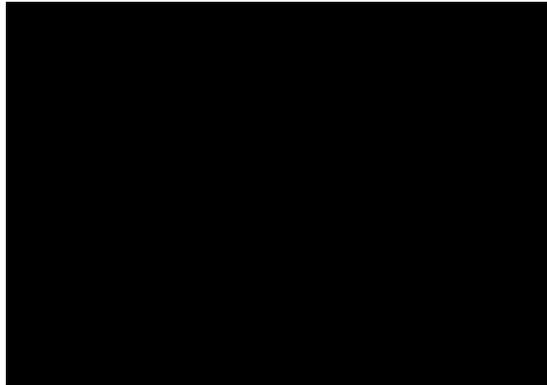


Illustration from *Kimono Dokuhon* magazine,  
published by *Sutairu*, December 1952

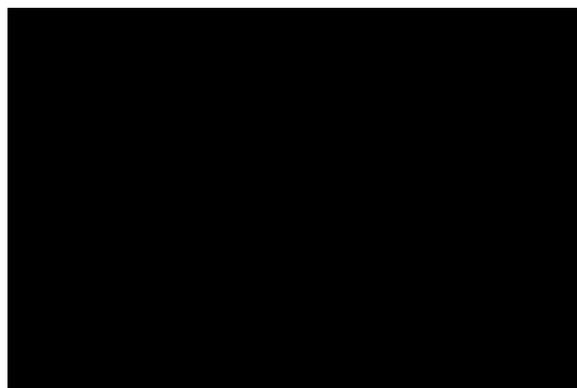
At about the same time, however, the style of wearing kimono was changed to suit more Western ideals of beauty. In 1953, when Itô Kinoko (b. 1932) won third prize in the international Miss Universe competition, a new kimono style that accentuated a curvaceous, long-legged silhouette, known as *hattô shin bijin* became highly fashionable within Japan. Thus, the kimono silhouette favored by Japanese women came to more closely resemble silhouettes popularized in European, British, and American contexts, while simultaneously the kimono was being promoted to Western women as a garment also suitable for them to wear.

By the late 1950s through the 1960s, the kimono made several major orchestrated appearances posing as an icon of Japan. Advertisements by the government-sponsored Japan Air Lines (JAL) that launched international flights in 1954 featured kimono-clad female flight attendants both in their advertisements as well as in reality in their first-class cabins that catered to international businessmen, and likely, the new-age jet setter seeking to experience a post-war Japan. The excitement and publicity generated by the 1959 imperial wedding of then Crown Prince Akihito to commoner Shoda Michiko included many photographs of the bride-to-be dressed in kimono, thereby visually tying the kimono to a female associated with one of the most symbolically-charged

households of Japan.<sup>27</sup> A watershed moment for promoting national interests, the 1964 Summer Olympics held in Tokyo, brought Japan into the global limelight again after a period of relative quiet under the Allied Occupation that ended in 1951.

Ironically, the 1960s also witnessed the birth of kimono dressing schools within Japan that sprang up around the country in order to capitalize on the younger generations' diminished knowledge of how to wear a kimono properly. In 1964, Yamanaka Norio (b. 1928) founded the Sôdô Kimono Academy, purportedly the "first institute of its kind to encourage the wearing of Japan's national dress in everyday life."<sup>28</sup> He later published his English-language *Book of Kimono*, and "since 1970 he has annually led delegations of more than a hundred members each, traveling to 45 countries in Asia, Europe and North and South America to promote international understanding of the kimono."<sup>29</sup> Academies like Yamanaka's established rules for how to put on a kimono and how to incorporate the complex array of accessories and padding, in essence, codifying the way the kimono should be properly worn.<sup>30</sup> What had once been a simple robe-like garment worn with a narrow belt in the seventeenth century had now become so cumbersome that the average Japanese woman required assistance and instruction in order to wear a kimono. In short, everyday wear had become extraordinary in Japan.

Hollywood starlets, such as Elizabeth Taylor (1932-2011) were also dressed in costumes inspired by the kimono. The Italian design house of Tiziani created a costume for the actress to wear in the 1968 film "Boom!" that was auctioned at Christie's New York in 2012. What appear to be ribbons sweep across the shoulders and along the flowing sleeves of this stunning gown. In lieu of an obi, the designer chose to decorate the bodice area with a horizontal band of gems. When viewed from the back, the sweeping ribbons are reminiscent of a *noshi* (felicitous strips of abalone) that appears on a renowned eighteenth century *furisode*. In 1921, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. attempted to purchase the *noshi furisode* from the textile dealer and collector Nomura Shôjirô (1879-1943).<sup>31</sup> Nomura politely managed to decline the offer, and instead donated the *noshi furisode* to the Yûzen Shikai (Yûzen Historical Society). This tour-de-force garment underwent extensive conservation, and was most recently exhibited in 2011. While it is unclear if the Tiziani designer (possibly Karl Lagerfeld, b. 1933) knew of or saw the actual *noshi furisode*, the visual similarities are hard to ignore. As this example suggests, another fascinating approach to examining kimono in the context of this one-hundred-year span would entail juxtaposing current manifestations of individual kimono with their historical precedents.

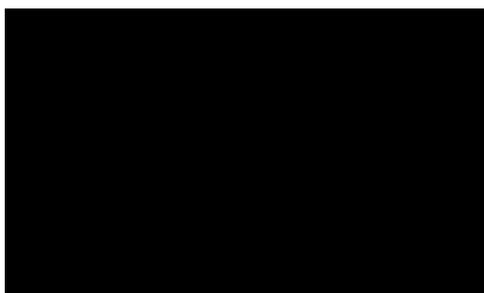


Costume designed by Tiziani for Elizabeth Taylor, 1962

Another approach to kimono culture encompassed by the term “international contemporaneity” might compare two objects that made appearances in parallel spatial-temporal contexts. In the same year that Elizabeth Taylor appeared in the jewel encrusted kimono gown costume, one of Japan’s Living National Treasures, Moriguchi Kakô (1909-2008), debuted his work entitled “Fragrant Garden” (*Kun-en*). This painstakingly designed garment is Moriguchi’s interpretation of a single, glorious chrysanthemum blossom; one of his favored motifs. When animated by the wearer’s movements, the blossom elegantly swirls and flows before the viewer’s eyes. And yet, this particular kimono has functioned primarily as an object for display rather than as a garment. While many of Kakô’s other works are coveted and worn by wealthy patrons, this kimono remained in the Moriguchi family for over thirty years. “Fragrant Garden” has since been exhibited in almost every major national and international exhibition of Kakô’s work, attesting to its extraordinary artistry. In 1999, it was purchased by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, where it continues to be revered as a work of art. In other words, although this work was created in the kimono format, its anticipated use as a work of art to be displayed was celebrated from the time of its conception. Today, many of Kakô’s kimono are appreciated more for their technical and artistic qualities than their wearability. Both Kakô’s “Fragrant Garden” and Tiziani’s costume for Elizabeth Taylor share the distinction of being one-of-a-kind productions.

Unlike Moriguchi Kakô, many Japanese designers have not received the prestigious designation as Living National Treasure, but nonetheless have attained some measure of international acclaim for their kimono works. Itchiku Kubota (1917-2003) is one of those designers. Domestically and internationally, Itchiku’s works have stirred admiration for his bold presentations and stunningly colorful designs. His artistic aspirations have challenged established conventions in the kimono world on many fronts. In his most ambitious production, the *Symphony of Light* series, the kimono transcends the traditional bounds of a wearable garment and emerges as an installation work of art. In this series, a single kimono functions as one panel in a contiguous, panoramic view of the four seasons and the cosmos. Itchiku was celebrated for his efforts to break the boundaries of displaying kimono in some circles, particularly outside of Japan. Yet within other circles in Japan, Itchiku was criticized for violating the conventional and some might argue rigid rules for wearing kimono. His runway model, for example, would wear high heels rather than Japanese split-toe socks (*tabi*) and traditional Japanese sandals (*geta*), wear her obi sash draped from her hips rather than bound tightly around her waist, and would don flamboyant hairstyles and hair ornaments. For Itchiku, kimono serves as a stage costume, as well as an experimental art form.

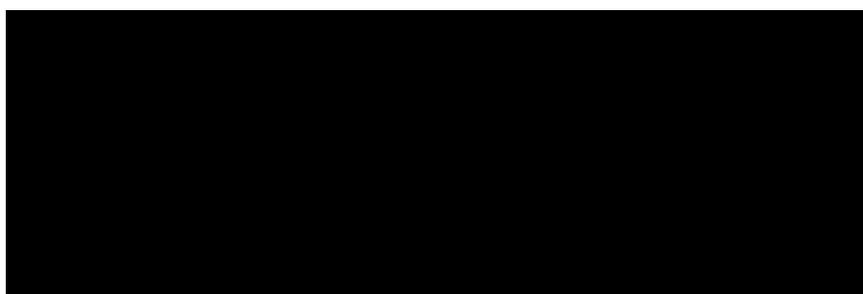
Outside of Japan, the kimono has come to be recognized both as an object of art, as well as a garment that symbolizes Japanese culture. Pre-modern kimono together with contemporary kimono designed by Living National Treasures are collected by major museums around the world. The works of many renowned Japanese textile artisans were featured in the British Museum’s 2007 exhibition, *Crafting Beauty in Modern Japan*. Kimono produced by Living National Treasures are highly coveted by museums and private collectors as objects for veneration and display, and much less so as clothing to wear.



Cover of *Crafting Beauty in Modern Japan* exhibition catalog,  
British Museum, 2007

So the “kimono”—broadly defined today as a loose-fitting T-shaped robe wrapped around the body and secured with a sash—has evolved from an everyday garment worn by Japanese men, women, and children in pre-modern Japan, into an extraordinary object of art appreciated around the world. In 2005, when Moriguchi Kunihiko, the son of Moriguchi Kakô, was interviewed by the art critic Judith Thurman, he posed this question: “What, then, is the kimono’s destiny if it ceases to be a thing worn?”

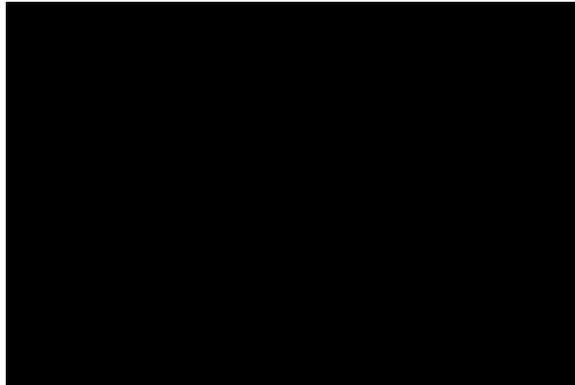
As I ruminate about kimono culture in the second decade of the twenty-first century, rather than a conclusion, I offer three comparisons that highlight shifts in the production, consumption, and marketing of kimono, then and now. Worn by both genders of all ages, and appealing to natives of and visitors to Japan, the comfortable, easy-care *yukata* may be Japan’s answer to reviving interest in wearing the T-shaped garment that is broadly encapsulated by the term *kimono*. In the Meiji era, the *yukata* emerged as casual dress for summer evenings. Today, an overseas visitor to a summer festival in Japan might refer to a *yukata* as a cotton *kimono*, or more generally, a summer *kimono*. But to most Japanese people, this festive, unlined, garment is still called a *yukata*, a category distinct from kimono. In 2002, the Japanese textile production company Kawashima Orimono collaborated with the British design firm, Bentley & Spens, to produce a line of designer *yukata* for the global market. The designs are often British, the fabric is produced in Japan, the garment is sewn in China, and distributed in Japan and England: a globally-produced *yukata*.



Labels attached to *yukata* manufactured by Kawashima Orimono  
with designs by Bentley & Spens, 2002

If we turn our attention to consumers of kimono, in contrast to Kon Wajirô’s 1925 survey of the Ginza when 33% of men and 99% of women wore Japanese style clothing, far fewer Japanese wear kimono today. The market has expanded beyond Japan, however, to include foreigners who

buy new kimono, as well as vintage and pre-modern kimono, to wear or for display. In a revival of *Ginbura*, or “strolling through the Ginza,” a select group of foreigners and Japanese, young and old, men and women participate in an event known as “Kimono de Ginza.” This group congregates on certain Saturday afternoons when the Ginza is reserved for pedestrian traffic. Invoking the *Ginbura* spectacle, the Kimono de Ginza group parades through the street adorned in their kimono, whether vintage, new, or a combination of both. Creating new occasions to wear kimono such as this event may help revitalize consumer interest in kimono. Other incentives to wear kimono have included free rides on Kyoto transportation and free museum entrance to major kimono exhibitions to anyone wearing kimono. In 2010, eleven kimono enthusiasts in Kyoto organized an event, via Twitter, known as “Kimono de Jack.”<sup>32</sup> Participants, regardless of nationality, arrive at a designated time and place wearing kimono. The event has attracted a following within Japan, and more recently, Kimono de Jack events have been held in England and the United States. These events suggest a commitment on the part of select groups to ensuring that kimono culture endures and is not limited only to Japanese wearers, but extends the wearing of kimono to citizens of the world.

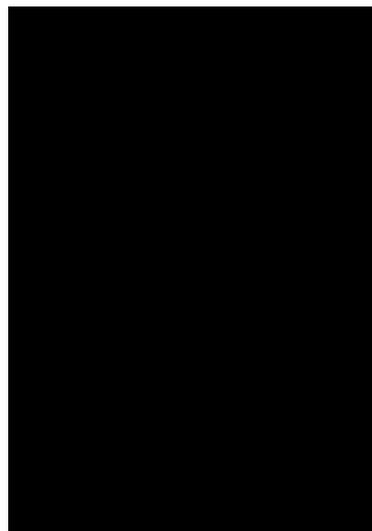


Strolling the Ginza, 2010

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the fashion designer Yohji Yamamoto (b. 1943) based his ideas about “liberating” kimono on his observations of Japanese fashions popular a century earlier. Yohji professed admiration for Japanese of the Meiji and Taishō eras who were “very good at blending the Western and the Traditional.” He romanticized, in particular, about a political leader of the Meiji Restoration who returned from America wearing “a pistol on his *hakama* pants, his hair in a pony tail, [and] his feet clad in leather boots.”<sup>33</sup> Yohji’s thoughts on the current state of kimono use in Japan appeared in a two-volume set of designs, published by Chisō, a Kyoto-based textile manufacturer whose roots extend back to the Edo era. Yohji states:

... the real reason why traditional kimono culture is about to [become] extinct is because of its tendency to aspire to ‘perfection’ as a style that does not allow any other foreign items to be added to it. My advice for anyone wearing kimono is .... to challenge this rigidity; let’s forget about attending kimono lessons...; let’s just wear [kimono] the way you want to, it’s only a kimono (meaning ‘material for wearing’), do it your way,... make it your own style. Be cool.<sup>34</sup>

Popular images of kimono, then and now, reveal how the kimono has evolved from an everyday garment in the Edo period into a recognizable, quintessential symbol of Japan. In the 2006 tourism poster shown below, the Japanese government promoted its “Cool Japan” campaign by deliberately co-opting appealing icons of both traditional and contemporary Japan. The poster depicts the Japanese pop stars Ami Onuki and Yumi Yoshimura, known by their stage name Puffy AmiYumi, dressed in boldly patterned red and pink kimonos and 60s-style boots. They stand in front of a backdrop of a blown-up image of the internationally recognizable woodblock print of Mt. Fuji by Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849). One of the pop star figures holds up a ripe eggplant while the other allows a hawk with outstretched wings to perch on her hand, auspicious symbols when appearing in one’s first dream (*hatsuyume*) of the New Year. Compared with Isoda Koryûsai’s (1735-1790) pair of eighteenth-century woodblock-printed images of the same theme, the imaginatively updated poster targets a global audience. The multivalent Japan-global appeal extends to the Cartoon Network’s animated version of the Puffy AmiYumi characters that appear in the poster’s lower right corner. The Japanese pop stars themselves in contemporary synchrony with their animated avatars are touted in English text as the “Goodwill Ambassador [sic] for the Visit Japan Campaign in the U.S.” The kimono is positioned front and center in this juxtaposition of then and now, real and imagined.



Pop stars Puffy Amy Yumi pose for “Cool Japan” poster, 2006  
Japan Travel Bureau

Reflecting on our research, then and now, I reviewed our initial 2009 proposal in which we established the parameters of our individual research target areas:

Terry Milhaupt investigates chronological shifts in kimono design by examining the materials and decorative techniques involved in the production of kimono for domestic and international consumption. Sarah Frederick analyzes representations of kimono in American and Japanese literature and popular media. Keiko Suzuki focuses on kimono made for export, as tourist art, souvenirs for foreigners, and kimono produced and consumed in foreign countries. Rie Mori investigates the experiences and consciousness of those who wear kimono, and considers how

the kimono was perceived both within Japan as well as in its colonized territories. As the leader of the group, Mori will integrate the research team's results, and position their findings within the broader scholarly debates of gender, Orientalism, and nationalism.

With the generous support of the Bunka Fashion Research Institute grant, for which I am most grateful, I presented the material discussed in the second half of this report in two venues. In May 2011, our group participated in a conference entitled “Material Culture, Craft & Community: Negotiating Objects Across Time & Place” at the Material Culture Institute at the University of Alberta, Canada. In February 2012, we presented our research at the Bunka Gakuen University’s Bunka Fashion Research Institute at a symposium entitled “The Internationalization of Kimono in the Twentieth Century: Japanization and De-Japanization.” Sarah Frederick’s readings of early twentieth century literary references to kimono led to discussions of the kimono as a garment that was positioned as both “modern” and “cosmopolitan” at certain moments in history. Keiko Suzuki’s presentation highlighted previously neglected, and undervalued types of objects (aloha shirts, *sukajan* jackets, and “happy coats”) and their relationship to kimono. Rie Mori’s presentation targeted another understudied area—kimono in regions colonized by Japan, primarily Korea and Taiwan—and turned critical attention toward the use and meaning of kimono within Asia.

For my presentations in both venues, the content and images were almost identical, with the primary difference being that one paper was delivered in English to a non-Japanese audience, and the other delivered in Japanese to a Japanese audience. Intriguingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, comments and queries diverged dramatically. At the Alberta conference, questions directed to me tended to concentrate on “how and when the kimono ideal became more closely associated with women’s bodies.” At the Bunka conference, a few comments targeted what were perceived as anomalous examples, and my lack of discussion of the “kimono as national costume” and “how the kimono is properly worn in Japan.” This raised the question: “who does the kimono belong to” (キモノはだれの物か) ?

Among the many previous examples cited, two images, in particular, demonstrate the cosmopolitan facets of kimono in the twentieth century.



The cultural and linguistic border-crossing of the 1952 *Sutairu/Style* magazine layout on the left is astounding when juxtaposed with the previously mentioned advertisement from the 1917 A.A. Vantine catalog on the right. Both images depict Caucasian women modeling kimono-shaped garments, and both include the word “kimono.” Yet, the image on the left represents a Japanese designer’s efforts to market kimono to non-Japanese in the post-World War II era, but in the

Japanese language. The layout on the right represents an American company's efforts to market kimono described as "typically Japanese" to an American audience. Clearly, the ambiguous nature of who "owns" the kimono, a question raised at our 2012 symposium, could be justifiably debated at many moments throughout the twentieth century. In short, kimono in the twentieth century—as a garment, an object of crafted art, an icon of Japan, or the subject of scholarly inquiry—is polysemous and continues to be an area of fascination both inside and outside of Japan, with its multiple functions conjured by the user, and its intended meanings reflected in the eye of the beholder.

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<sup>1</sup> Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), 73-74, 129-135, 291-293.

<sup>2</sup> J. Thomas Rimer, "Introduction," in *Since Meiji: Perspectives on the Japanese Visual Arts, 1868-2000*, ed. J. Thomas Rimer, trans. Toshiko McCallum (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Satô Dôshin, *Modern Japanese Art and the Meiji State: The Politics of Beauty*, trans. Nara Hiroshi (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Trust, 2011), 29-31.

<sup>4</sup> Satô, *Modern Japanese Art*, 31.

<sup>5</sup> Reiko Tomii, "'International Contemporaneity' in the 1960s: Discoursing on Japan and Beyond," *Japan Review* 21 (2009): 123-5.

<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the positioning of Japan as "East" in contrast to the "West" has erased important realms from the discussion; namely, the role of the kimono within "Asia." For this project, my colleague, Mori Rie, has begun to question the meaning of the kimono in regions colonized by the Japanese, particularly, Korea and Taiwan.

<sup>7</sup> Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," and Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3-63 and 64-94.

<sup>8</sup> Appadurai, "Introduction," 34.

<sup>9</sup> Appadurai, on Georg Simmel's *The Philosophy of Money* (1907; English translation, 1978), in "Introduction," 3.

<sup>10</sup> Appadurai, "Introduction," 41-2.

<sup>11</sup> Appadurai, "Introduction," 41-3.

<sup>12</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Public Worlds, Vol. 1 (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 3.

<sup>13</sup> Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 9.

<sup>14</sup> Kopytoff, "Cultural Biography," 67.

<sup>15</sup> For her reflections on the experience of wearing kimono, and its longevity as a garment, see Yoshiko I. Wada, "Changing Attitudes Toward the Kimono: A Personal Reflection," in *The Kimono Inspiration: Art and Art-to-Wear in America*, Rebecca A. T. Stevens and Yoshiko Iwamoto Wada, eds. (Washington DC: The Textile Museum, 1996), 172. On the kimono as Japan's national dress, see Yoshiko I. Wada, "The History of Kimono: Japan's National Dress," in *The Kimono Inspiration: Art and Art-to-Wear in America*, Rebecca A. T. Stevens and Yoshiko Iwamoto Wada, eds. (Washington DC: The Textile Museum, 1996), 131-160.

<sup>16</sup> Stephen Vlastos provides two general meanings for the term tradition. "First, tradition designates a temporal frame (with no clear beginning), which marks off the historical period preceding modernity. Used in this way tradition aggregates and homogenizes premodern culture and posits a historical past against which the modern human condition can be measured." "Tradition in the second and more frequent usage represents a continuous cultural transmission in the form of discrete cultural practices of 'the past' that remain vital in the present." See Stephen Vlastos, "Tradition: Past/Present Culture and

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Modern Japanese History,” in *Mirror of Modernity: Invented Traditions in Modern Japan*, ed. Stephen Vlastos (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1998), 3.

<sup>17</sup> The Empress’ proclamation was published in *Chôya shinbun*, 19 January 1887. Translated in Julia Meech-Perkarik, *The World of the Meiji Print: Impressions of a New Civilization* (New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1986), 128-130.

<sup>18</sup> David Lowenthal, *The Past is A Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>19</sup> <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O77753/kimono-fabric/>

<sup>20</sup> <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O87849/kimono/>

<sup>21</sup> Fukai Akiko, *Jyaponizumu in fuasshon* (Tokyo: Kyoto Fukushoku Bunka Kenkyû Zaidan, 1994), 71, and Suoh Tamami, “1880-1910 nendai no igirisu ni okeru Nihonsei shitsunaigi: Ribatei shokai tsûshin hanbai katarogu wo tegakari toshite (Japanese-made Gowns in British Liberty’s Catalogs 1880s-1910s),” *Dresstudy* 51 (Spring 2007).

<sup>22</sup> Hirota Takashi, “Meiji sue Taishô shoki no yûshutsuyô kimono ni kansuru ikkôsatsu: Takashimaya Shiryôkan wo chûshin ni,” *Fukushoku Bigaku* 42 (2006): 19-35.

<sup>23</sup> Yamamori Yumiko, “Japanese Arts in America, 1895-1920, and the A.A. Vantine and Yamanaka Companies,” *Studies in the Decorative Arts*, 15, no. 2 (Spring-Summer 2008): 115-117.

<sup>24</sup> Or in the case of the more expensive custom-made kimono, artisans specialized in particular stages of the production process, such as paste-resist application for *yûzen*-dyeing, gold-leaf imprinting, embroidery, or ink outlining.

<sup>25</sup> Kawakatsu Ken’ichi, *Kimono (Japanese Dress)*, Tourist Library 3 (Tokyo: Japan Travel Bureau, 1960, first edition 1936).

<sup>26</sup> Kawakatsu, *Kimono*, 7.

<sup>27</sup> Kimura Taka and Watanabe Midori, *Michiko-sama no okimono: shashinshû* (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbun Shuppan, 2009).

<sup>28</sup> Yamanaka Norio, *The Book of Kimono* (Tokyo, New York, San Francisco: Kodansha, 1982), back of book jacket.

<sup>29</sup> Yamanaka, *Kimono*, back of book jacket.

<sup>30</sup> Liza Carihfield Dalby, *Kimono: Fashioning Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 119-121.

<sup>31</sup> Kyoto Bunka Hakubutsukan and Mainichi Shinbunsha, eds., *Kyo no kosode: dezain ni miru Nihon no eregansu* (Kyoto Kimono: Inspired Grace and Elegance from Momoyama To Edo), exh. cat., (Kyoto: The Museum of Kyoto and The Mainichi Newspapers, 2011), 245.

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.facebook.com/note.php?noteid=140708709301647>

<sup>33</sup> Yohji Yamamoto, “Special Contribution,” in *Chisô kata yûzen dentô zuanshû: Yuzen gurafuikkusu 1: hana to kusaki hen* (Chisô stencil-dyed yûzen traditional design collection: Yûzen Graphics 1: Foliage and Flora), ed. Ogasawara Sae (Tokyo: Gurafuikkusha, 2002), 5.

<sup>34</sup> Yamamoto, “Special Contribution,” p. 5