

The Cosmopolitanism of the "Kimono" in Magazine Fiction

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Photographs of Japanese women in “kimono” on a Tokyo street are extremely popular media images in contemporary North America. Words used to describe these scenes usually include “contradiction” “contrast” “juxtaposition” or “when modern meets tradition.” In America, these sorts of photographs are among the most popular ones of Japan, along with images of Tsukiji fish market, and are used to represent a broader fascination with the juxtaposition of “tradition and modernity.” Meanwhile the very same images might seem completely unremarkable to a resident of Japan, where the tall building with “western” architecture and kimono have shared the same space for a very long time.

As Edward Said has shown in his *Orientalism*, for example, the west has tended to view the “orient” as the past (and the feminine) in contrast to a masculine and modern West.¹ This seems particularly problematic for any period that is already seen as modern in Japan, whether the terms used are *gendai* (現代) or *kindai* (近代), or loan words like *modan* (モダン)、*modanizumu* (モダンイズム). By the Taishô era, these terms were just as likely to refer to aspects of Japanese culture as to “the West” and were used self-referentially. While these sometimes do refer to western aspects of Japanese culture, the point is that during the times and contexts in which terms like 近代 and モダン have been used, they do not necessarily refer to “the west.” To fail to recognize this risks falling back into an orientalist view of Japanese modernity, in spite of our best intentions. It seems to me that for many who wear kimono in this context and those who inhabit the same spaces as them, the ability to choose to do so (or not do so) has many of the qualities that we might label “cosmopolitan” if we were not so focused on the idea that kimono is a representation of Japan’s past. It is worth looking at how it appears when one focuses on its place as one of the many costume choices a person with the financial and cultural capital to do so can make.

Much of the study of the modern kimono, including (or even particularly) that which considers its internationalization, exhibits many of the same limitations of the more Euro-centric accounts of modernism. For example, if we look at considerations of “Japonisme” in dress, the focus is often on what the non-Japanese world has done with these things Japanese; in this scenario, the kimono in Japan remains an unchanging or unexamined thing.² Meanwhile, “the

¹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979).

² Rebecca A. T. Stevens and Yoshiko Iwamoto Wada, eds. *The Kimono Inspiration: Art and Art-to-wear in American* (Washington, DC: The Textile Museum, 1996). This is subtle example, and I call special attention to Yoshiko Wada's "Part Three: Toward an American Understanding of the Kimono: Japan's National Dress," 129-184. It deals very well with the historical changes in kimono in Japan, and even its meaning for Japanese Americans like herself, there is no analysis of how the whole history of Japonisme explored in the rest of the book might have influenced and even helped to create the idea of kimono as "Japan's national dress."

West” becomes a sort of “other” against which the “kimono” defines itself. At its worst, this simply repeats or describes the structure of Orientalism – an authentic, beautiful, cultural artifact becomes material for exploring modern identities in the west and for creating its own modernism, even if this is unintentional. In many ways it also repeats the error of understanding women in kimono in Tokyo as “contradiction” – kimono is “tradition,” western clothing is modernity. But westerners wearing kimono can be modernists, (or in the case of American anime fans doing cosplay – post-modernism). (Figure 1). There is nothing inherently more “modern” about a “dress” than “kimono” in their own contexts of, for example, 1920s Japan and America. It is only via the mutual othering and views of modernity that such a view develops. Even in looking at an image (here from the 1950s) (Figure 2) the modernist might be mistaken to be this foreign woman, when really it is probably as much so the designer, Uno Chiyo (宇野千代). (Figure 3).³

Much scholarship in both North America and Europe on artistic and literary modernism has treated the non-West as primarily “later” and derivative of modernity and modernism. Items from the non-west become the “other” for Western modernity, providing the material and contrast for confirmation of that modernity. Even though this is a problem that has come to be recognized, the structure of the study of modernism in the West has continued in many cases to follow this form nonetheless. In his recent essay dedicated to Edward Said, Andreas Huyssen has argued that better attention to modernisms outside the west on their own terms is an important and necessary direction for 1.) the study of modernisms 2.) any consideration of the contemporary situation that comes to be called “globalization” (or related terms like “internationalization” and the renewed interest in the category of “cosmopolitanism”).

Every culture, as we know ...has its hierarchies and social stratifications, and these differ greatly according to local circumstances and histories. Unpacking such temporal and spatial differentiations might be a good way to arrive at new kinds of comparisons that would go beyond the clichés of colonial versus postcolonial, modern versus postmodern, Western versus Eastern, center versus periphery, global versus local, the West versus the rest. To de-Westernize notions such as modernity and modernism, we need a lot more theoretically informed descriptive work about modernisms at large, their interaction or noninteraction with Western modernisms, their relationship to different forms of colonialism...their codings of the role of art and culture in relation to state and nationhood.⁴

One direction to which those thinking about these issues have turned is the category of cosmopolitanism. In the work of Immanuel Kant and a philosophical tradition that follows, the emphasis on this term has been on the development of a sense of community beyond the nation,

³ *Style: Kimono Tokuhon*. December 1956 and September 1957.

⁴ Andreas Huyssen, “Geographies of Modernism in a Globalizing World,” *New German Critique* 34:1 (Winter 2007): 200.

and of “detachment from local cultures and the interests of the nation” in favor of attachments to “humanity.”⁵ But more recent emphases by some have been on the ways modern people have come to see culture as constructed, with cosmopolitanism emphasizing the “ambivalence that exists within any site of identification.”⁶ It is also increasingly aware of how any effort to overcome a national identity has also to be viewed with attention to factors such as class, gender, and colonialism when we think about people identifying across national borders. Naoki Sakai’s argument that the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity sphere, as well as the thinking of Kyoto School Philosophers, constitutes a form of cosmopolitanism that is also imperialist in nature, resonates even outside of Japanese studies for its challenge to more easily positive views of cosmopolitanism by revealing the universalist nationalism of imperial Japan, and of the United States.⁷ And from another angle, there is the concept of “critical cosmopolitanism” which observes fiction writers using a cosmopolitan perspective to criticize the status quo in a local context but without uncomplicated claims to universality.⁸ Sakai’s view no doubt poses as challenge to the notion of “critical cosmopolitanism,” but my point here is simply that such sophisticated discussions of cosmopolitanism and modernism would benefit from attention to the contextual representation of the modern kimono; and likewise, the study of kimono could gain from attention to categories such as global modernism and critical cosmopolitanism. These approaches have certainly helped me think about many of the objects and writings our collaborative group has looked at together and separately during the project.

“Kimono” in one sense appears to be rooted in the nation of Japan and national identity, and to have sometimes been considered a possible tool of empire as well.⁹ Kimono equals tradition and “western dress” equals modernity: this is certainly one way the symbolic structure worked in 1920s Japan. At the same time, the woman’s garment known as “kimono” in the first half of the twentieth century became caught up in modernism, and translated across national borders. Hasegawa Shigure (長谷川時雨), founder of *Women’s Arts* (女人芸術) magazine is

⁵ Rebecca A. Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitanism Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 9.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Especially Naoki Sakai, “Subject and Substratum: On Japanese Imperial Nationalism,” *Cultural Studies* 14(3/4) (2000): 462-530. This idea is referred to in Pheng Cheah’s introduction to *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 30. The original piece by Sakai was not included in the edited volume, but one can see in Cheah’s discussion its potential importance for the discussion of cosmopolitanism. In Japanese, Sakai’s writing on this appears in 「総説 多民族国家に於ける国民主体の政策と少数者の統合」『岩波講座 近代日本の文化史 第7巻 総力戦下の知と制度』, 東京:岩波書店, 2002.

⁸ For a thorough discussion of this approach and several examples of its application see Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitanism Style*.

⁹ Unless otherwise noted, I will use “kimono” here refer to the t-shaped garment worn by women, but this usage is of course a relatively new one. Mori Rie’s presentation at our symposium February 18th 2012 discussed importantly the usages of “kimono” which even differs dramatically across its representation in the three Japanese writing systems of hiragana, katakana, and kanji characters, as well as across time. Clothing called “kimono” are also worn by men, and in the 1920s, the word was used as commonly as the general word for “clothing” as for Japanese-style clothing.

quite specific about the fact that for women of her generation *yôfuku* (洋服, Western clothes) are no longer *seiyô kara kita fukusô* (西洋から来た服装, clothing that came from the West) but is part of *sekaiteki fukusô* (世界的服装, worldly clothing); it is no longer imitative or derivative of the west but part of the clothes they wear. The flip side of this is that “kimono” are also at that moment becoming “worldly,” and for the cosmopolitan Japanese man or woman it is part of the clothing “cultural figures” (文化人 *bunkajin*) wear. We can see Hasegawa trying to avoid binaristic ways of thinking about both kimono and *yôfuku*.¹⁰ One can also observe her subtle attention to class and gender, with her references to cultural figures. She also speaks of *tanjunka* (単純化 simplification), which proposes a sort of modernization discourse for clothing. Just as we see with artistic modernism, this drive for simplification and abstraction into essential qualities can also be accompanied by cosmopolitanism, exoticism, and other forms of complexity and eclecticism.

Print culture of Taishô and early Showa eras aimed at women and girls is one fruitful area to examine. While we might tend to think of “girls’ magazines” (少女雑誌) with their focus on the school as emphasizing a national identity, they have simultaneously an aspirational mode, one towards cosmopolitanism. Their images and writing often aim to finding a space that is “other” and outside the conventional family structure, as well as outside other economic and social restrictions that are based on gender norms. Sometimes these are embodied through “western” symbols; this is seen in the work of Yoshiya Nobuko (吉屋信子, 1896-1973) where western flowers, instruments (violin, piano, etc.), architecture, and dress as indicators of alternative spaces. At the same time, these are less about their place of origin and their attachment to certain groups of nations or ethnic groups than to their “otherness” from a specific restrictive space. So other alternatives can come from inside Japan, such as novel in Sado Island where she lived as a child, Karuizawa, or Hokkaido.¹¹ The settings can also be Asia, sometimes but not always meaning Japanese colonial spaces. But the very same sort of desire is often reflected, quite simply, by the presence of a window, rather than any particular geopolitical reference. It is not, in other words, that “West” equals modernity. Instead, clothing is one route to broadening existing boundaries, whether those of the family, the state, or class restrictions. And this is not at all unlike the structure of aspiration that scholars of British cosmopolitan women’s identity in the same period, that often turned “Eastward” for similar reasons. Though she is of course not what we would think of as a *shôjo*, recent writings on Virginia Woolf and critical cosmopolitanism display a very similar sort of sentiment; this is part of the culture of global modernity, and a major part of its appeal for women. As Mica Nava writes:

Virginia Woolf speaks from another place, yet with a similar sensitivity to exclusion, when in her *Three Guineas* she identifies with the outsider: ‘As a

¹⁰ Hasegawa Shigure, *Fujin kurabu*, 1935, 130.

¹¹ An interesting example is *Arashi no bara* (Stormy rose). This is the first work written by Yoshiya after her trip to Paris and America, and the husband of the woman protagonist is a man who goes to Paris because he is a painter. His wife, however, travels to her hometown in Hokkaido, and there is thus a comparison between these two places both remote from and different from Tokyo. *Yoshiya Nobuko Zenshû* vol. 3 (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 1975).

woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world.' So what is also being posed here, in addition to not belonging, is an imagined inclusivity which transcends the immediate symbolic family or nation.¹²

I note that Takemura Kazuko makes a similar argument about Woolf in a 1997 article, one that pays subtle attention to the interaction among colonialism, Orientalism, and Woolf's lesbianism, including the use of "Eastern" clothing such as Chinese dress.¹³

Some of the work on modernist styles of kimono by Takehisa Yumeji and his contemporary illustrators work beyond the binaries I talked about earlier, and I think it is in part because of this other strong dynamic of the "outside" and space, rather than a specific other. **(Figure 4)** In Boston, our group viewed a number of works from the postcard collection at the Museum of Fine arts, which provide colorful examples that are quite similar to what you see in magazines and books aimed at women and girls. For example, this series sets young women in kimono in the context of modern art settings and non-Japanese flowers (tulips, roses, etc.). **(Figure 5)** I do not think it is an image of "juxtaposition" or "contradiction" but of a cosmopolitan modernity.

Even in cases where there is nothing remarkably modern about the style of the kimono or even the writing, we can see the kimono used textually to represent distance from existing social structures. Of course, many of these are instituted in the Meiji period, such as the family system as formulated in the Meiji Civil Code. In that context a family crest or sense of affiliation that predates those institutions can be used to critique them. Yoshiya Nobuko's Flower Stories (花物語), which appeared in girls' magazines in from 1917-1925, uses various world fashions for effect in both the text and illustrations. Most obvious are the uses of Chinese qipao dresses and velvet dresses to indicate girls who are of other ethnicities or have lived abroad. But I pick a less obvious example from the first series, a story Fukujisô (福寿草, "Pheasant's Eye"), where a kimono pattern is used to suggest an intimate and even erotic bond between a young woman and the bride who comes to marry her older brother after the death of their mother.

New Year's morning. Kaori and her new big sister put on their beautiful long-sleeved [kimono] that were dyed with the family's beautiful crest. Kaori's gown was a lively purple and her sister's an elegant black fabric, but at the chest near the sleeve of these formal kimono, they each had identical flower patterns embroidered in dazzling gold thread. That flower was the pheasant's eye, a fulsome sort of yellow flower.¹⁴

¹² Mica Nava, "Cosmopolitan Modernity: Everyday Imaginaries and the Register of Difference," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 81:19 (2002) 81: 90.

¹³ Takemura Kazuko, "'Kanojo' wa doko kara kataru no ka: Baajinia Urufu no yuigon," *Gendai Shiso* 25:13(December, 1997): 68-82.

¹⁴ Reprinted in Yoshiya Nobuko, *Hana monogatari* (Tokyo: Kokushokankôkai, 2003), 1:245. This particular story is not included in the Yoshiya Nobuko zenshû version of Hanamonogatari from Asahi Shinbunsha.

In 1920, this flower, the *fukujisô*, grew all over the world, and could be seen as part of a Japanese kimono pattern. But its Latin name is *adonis*, because the flower was said to spring up from where his blood had fallen on the ground, suggesting a “bloodline” or family connection not based on heterosexual relations or marriage. The golden thread in these women’s matching kimono provides a possibility for an alternative kinship to heterosexual marriage. In the silent, black and white film version of this story, the loss of the colors of the embroidery in that medium, requires more exaggerated acting to suggest the love between girl and her sister-in-law.¹⁵ There is nothing particularly “cosmopolitan” about these characters in this story on the plot level, but in the context of the full *Flower Story* collection, flower pattern becomes one of an international collection of flora that represents an array of available ethnic and hybrid identities for girls, an array that appears to allow for a wider range of sexual experiences as well. Each flower story uses a vivid description of a piece of clothing to set the visual images of the story, and many items that we might usually call *wafuku* (和服, Japanese clothing) are set within an international fashion framework.

No doubt one of the most famous representations of modernism and kimono is Tanizaki Jun’ichiro’s *A Fool’s Love* (痴人の愛), translated into English as *Naomi*. (Interestingly, this book is probably even more famous among Japanese specialists and undergraduates who study Japanese literature in English, speaking countries than in Japan. It is well translated and readily available to teach in beginning Japanese literature courses. Its comparability to Nabokov’s *Lolita* and its thematizing of American culture in Japan make it particularly intriguing for this audience). In what I take to be an oversimplified and mistaken interpretation, this book is often read as being about “a tragic obsession with the West” without attention to the layers of representation here. One of the best examples of these layers is the set of passages on the female main character Naomi’s clothing. For example:

“You’re a bit off from other Japanese, and an ordinary Japanese kimono doesn’t do anything for you. How would it be if you wore Western clothes? Or Japanese clothes in some new style?”

“What kind of style?”

“Women are going to be more and more active in the future. Those heavy, tight things they wear now won’t do.”

“How about a narrow-sleeved kimono (筒っぼ) with an informal sash (兵児帯)?”

“That kind of obi would be fine. Anything’s all right as long as you try for original styles. I wonder if there isn’t some outfit that’s neither Japanese, Chinese, or Western...”

“If there is, will you buy it for me?”

¹⁵ The film bore the same title and was released in 1935 by Shinkô Kinema, directed by Kawate Jirô.

“Of course I will. I’m going to get all sorts of clothes for you, and we’ll switch them around every day. You don’t need expensive stuff. Muslin and common silk will do. The important thing is to have original designs.”...

Nowadays, it’s fashionable for women to make summer robes out of organdy, Georgette, and cotton voile, but Naomi and I were probably the first to use these fabrics. For some reason the textures were very becoming to her. We weren’t interested in serious kimonos. Instead, she made the material into narrow-sleeved ones, pajama suits, and robes that looked like nightgowns. Sometimes she’d simply wrap a bolt of cloth around her body and fasten it with brooches. Dressed in one or another of these outfits, she’d parade around the house, stand in front of the mirror, and pose while I took pictures. Wrapped in gauzy, translucent clothing of white, rose, or pale lavender, she was like a beautiful large blossom in a vase. “Try it this way; now this way,” I’d say. Picking her up, laying her down, telling her to be seated or to walk, I gazed at her by the hour.¹⁶

This passage exhibits various desires to overcome a fixed ethnic identity through performative and eclectic use of clothing. Interestingly, Jôji and Naomi do not choose to have her simply wearing *yôfuku* (洋服) or “western clothing” but instead seek some sort of original clothing that is not Western nor Eastern, nor, as is often forgotten in reading of these books, Chinese either. In connection with Mori Rie’s presentation, I note that the places I have left as “kimono” are kimono written in kanji characters. This novel was published in 1923 and 24, precisely when this term was coming to be attached more solidly to a particular shape of garment, rather than clothing more generally. Earlier in the novel when Naomi wears some Japanese clothing such as *yukata* or thin silk kimono, these are described using more specific clothing and fabric descriptions; it is arguable that the narrator is marking a shift in the language used for such clothing, precisely in the context of increased awareness of a relationship between clothing and national identities in this period, something that is displayed throughout this novel, including in scenes where the characters interact with “foreigners” whether American or Russian.

This section of the novel also comes immediately after and in the same chapter as the choice for Naomi and Jôji to get married. These outfits and piles of random fabric stand in for a trousseau, while also suggesting Naomi’s semi-escape from certain strictures of marriage. Ironically though, her class background in a poor neighborhood in Sensoku, near or in the Yoshiwara pleasure quarter district, means she does not have much access to that sort of clothing anyway; and when she wears appropriate, more subdued kimono for a young wife, Jôji thinks that she looks like a prostitute for foreigners. We can see how East and West, or Japanese and American, is one set of pairings at work here. But also on display is Tanizaki’s sophisticated view of the ways that the this contrast works, and the complexity of living within modern urban

¹⁶ These translations are based on those by Anthony Chambers but some passages regarding clothing have been altered slightly. The translations are found in Tanizaki Jun’ichirô, Anthony Chambers trans, *Naomi* (New York: North Point Press, 1985), 36-38.

spaces where so many images, products, and clothing from various places co-exist in the same time; this is one of the aspects of cosmopolitan modernity to which Tanizaki is closely attuned. Much of their discussion of her appearance is via what film scholar Miriam Hansen calls “vernacular modernism,” the styles of Hollywood that circulate globally by the 1920s.¹⁷

Similarly, what brings “kimono” into the sphere of the cosmopolitan is in large part their representation - movement of the objects themselves, of the images through mechanically reproduced photos, cinema, and illustrations. It is not simply that the image of the kimono is communicated outside of Japan, but its meaning within Japan is transformed by these representations. (Figure 6) They are commodified, solidified, and become “Japanese” through this process of representation. Within Japan, people become increasingly sensitive to the category of “kimono” itself as something that can be chosen among other options, and could be part of a woman’s shifting cosmopolitan identity. At the same time, there is awareness of the ways that class and gender affect those choices. These make very poignant and ironic Naomi and Jôji’s cosmopolitan impulses, and desire to find something that has no connection to a given nation state. All of this is very complicated, but we can see that these costumes do not represent in a binaristic way “east and west” or “modern or traditional” (or “masculine” or “feminine”).

¹⁷ Miriam Hansen, “The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism,” *Modernism/Modernity* 6.2 (1999) 59-77.



図1 ポストンの地下鉄 2010年4月 筆者撮影
FIGURE 1. April 2010, Boston Subway. Photograph by author.



図2 『スタイル きもの読本』1956年9月「きものの異国情緒」
FIGURE 2. "The Exoticism of Kimono." *Style: Kimono Reader*. September, 1956.

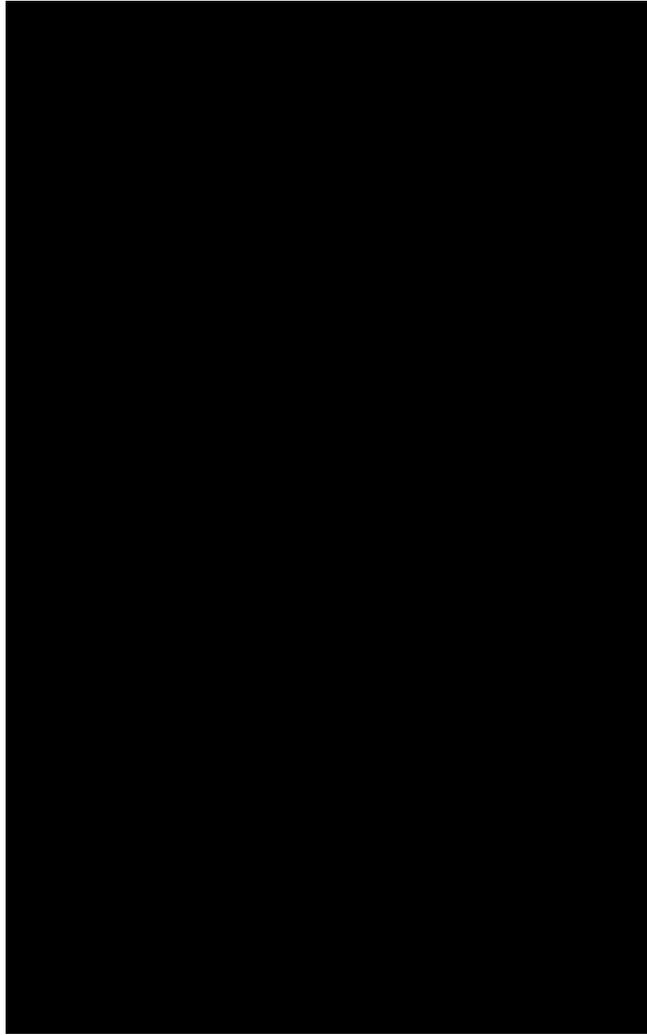


図3 『スタイルきもの読本』1957年9月

FIGURE 3. From the Uno Chiyo International Kimono Show.
Style: Kimono Reader. September, 1957.



図4 竹久夢二『令女界』1927年9月
FIGURE 4. Takehisa Yumeji, *Girls' World*. September, 1927.

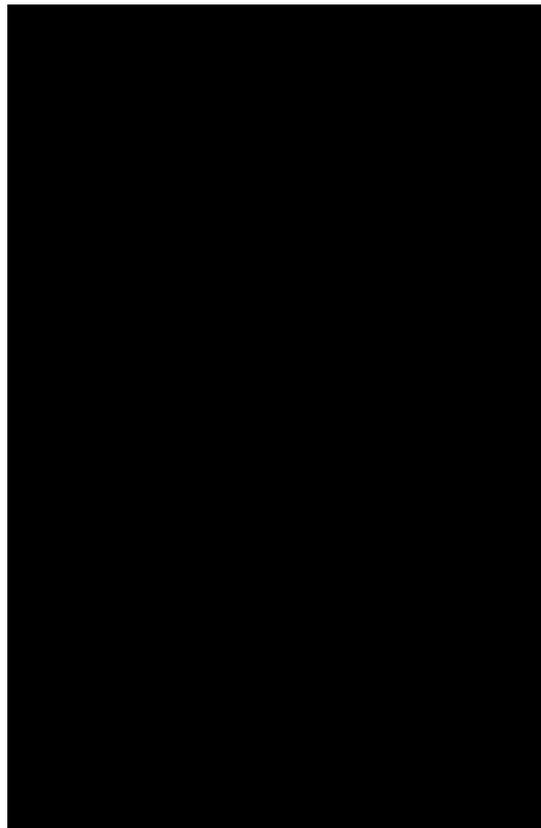


図5 ボストン美術館所蔵絵はがき
FIGURE 5. Museum of Fine Arts Boston (postcard collection)

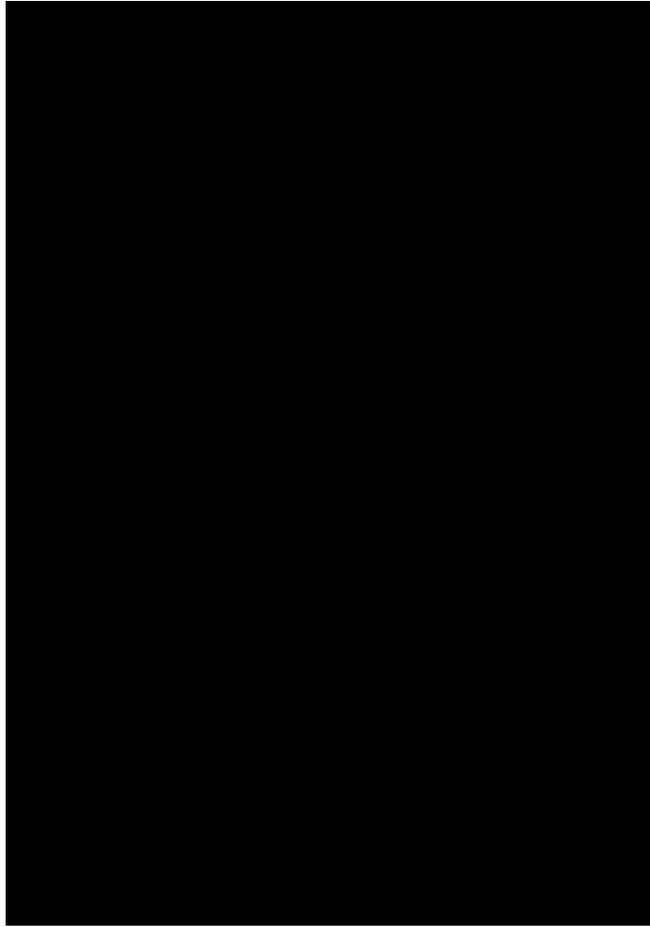


図 6 『婦人倶楽部』 8月 1934年

FIGURE 6. *Ladies' Club* August 1934.