

CHAPTER 3: ASPECTS OF KIMONO DEVELOPMENT IN JAPANESE CIVILIZATION

3.1 Introduction

Everyone knows by now that the traditional Japanese dress is called a kimono. Kimonos are cut in standard sizes and fitted as they are put on, unlike Western clothing, which is fitted in the cut. Though no longer worn frequently in modern days, kimonos are still worn to the most important events.

Although western-style dress had been popular in Japan since the late 19th century among men, and since the 1920's among women, the traditional kimono has by no means disappeared. Its form and use have been refined to play an appropriate and major role in Japan's modern life.

The kimono assumed its present form during the Edo period (1603-1867); designers have tried to modernize its style over the last decade or two because the Japanese have found that in everyday life, whether in office or factory, shopping or teaching, the kimono is not as practical as and more unwieldy than Western-style dress, which is less restrictive in movement and easier to take care of.

At the time of the Meiji Restoration of 1868, men readily adopted the business suit and reserved kimono for home, relaxation and formal wear. The material is silk or hand woven wool for winter and cotton for summer.

In the last 60 years, the wearing of Japan's traditional clothing has been demoted to a few special events; however, the kimono still represents the essence and the nature of Japan. The beauty of kimono lies not only in its magnificent artistry of design and decoration; its underlining beauty is its ability to display the inner beauty and qualities of the wearer.

In its straight lines the kimono does not accentuate the curves of the body as form fitting Western clothes do, in fact it negates them.¹ However, because of the way the kimono is made and worn, it requires the wearer to move with grace and thoughtfulness, thus demonstrating the wearer's inner qualities. There are few things more graceful than someone who knows how to wear and move in a kimono. Both women and men wear kimonos, but most of the writer's discussions will be focused on the aspect's section.

3.2 Aspects in Kimono Development

Unlike some slouchy Westerners who routinely appear in oversized T-shirt and torn blue jeans, the Japanese take their fashion seriously. Depending on the occasion, dressing up in Japan may mean donning a dazzling dress or cloaking oneself in that classical courtly creation- the kimono.

Reflecting the Japanese appreciation for applied art, kimonos are boldly shaped garments that delight with elegant embroidery. Like so much in Japanese culture, kimono requires painstaking precision and patience. Not only do weaving, wearing, airing, and refolding the traditional Japanese dress demand serious time and effort, but once harnessed

¹ Daniel Sosnoski (ed.), *Introduction to Japanese Culture*, Rutland, Vt.: Tuttle, 1996, p. 86.

in a kimono, one has limited options.²

It is erroneous, of course, to suppose that other cultures do not have fashion. Fashion is not a concept or aspect which relates solely to clothes, although most people associate it with this, and we call the contemporary clothing trade the Fashion Industry. Fashion is found in all artifacts and, over time, in all cultures design evolves as new influences or materials are made available which are more attractive.³

For many cultures, the lack of long pictorial or artifact record means that we are not aware of these changes, and we assume, therefore, that design is static. That gives rise to the desire to preserve 'folk dress' as being the 'traditional' or the 'natural' dress of a society.

Once a society is literate, then the imposition of tradition becomes possible, because it can be written down, and this can lead to a more static appearance for all aspects of life. Therefore the apparent deviation of Japanese fashionable kimono or dress with its constantly changing shapes is merely an extreme form of normal human curiosity and delight in form, color, shape and pattern.

² Charles Danziger, *Japan for Starter: 52 Things You Need to Know about Japan*, Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1996, p. 157.

³ Naomi Tarrant, *The Development of Costume*, Edinburgh: National Museums of Scotland in Conjunction with Routledge, 1994, p. 153.

3.21 Political Aspects

Rank was also reflected in clothes during Tokugawa era. For ceremonial occasions and when on duty, the *samurai*⁴ wore clothes such as *kami-shimo*. The formal part of his attire is the *kami-shimo*, the combination of ‘upper and lower’, which is, an over-jacket (*kataginu*) with stiffed shoulder and trousers (*hakama*), more like a divided skirt; the trousers had a very low crotch, and opening at the sides, and were held in place by two sets of ties on the front and rear parts, fastening round the waist.

On ordinary occasions for samurai of all ranks, and for lower-ranking ones at all times, these trousers finished at a little above ground-level, but for superior ranking warriors at special ceremonies, very long trousers were worn; these trailed on the floor and the feet were entirely enclosed within them in *naga-bakama*. The wearing of these *naga-bakama* required special skill; any change of direction had to be accompanied by sharp movements of the feet to bring the trailing portion behind the wearer, otherwise there was danger of tripping; he must also grip each leg of the trousers, pulling it up at every step to give his leg room for movement.

It was possible to run in them, but this required extremely good coordination between hand and leg. Obviously this was an impracticable garment, although an imposing one; its use was a status symbol, demonstrating that its wearer had the leisure to learn to manage it, but it is also said that the rulers ordered it to be worn because it would obstruct anyone if he tried to make a violent attack. They were not normally worn out of doors.

⁴ *Samurai* is an aristocratic former Japanese warrior of a class that dominated the military aristocracy from the 11th to 19th centuries during Japanese era.

Beneath the *kami-shimo*, the ordinary kimono was worn, with a strap behind which the straps of the shoulder garment were inserted, and underneath that a white undergarment which showed at the neck. The girdle held the swords in their scabbards. The costume was completed by white *tabi* –socks with a padded sole and division between the big toe and the smaller ones to allow for the thong of the footwear, when that was worn.

The *Shogun*⁵ himself, and *daimyō*⁶ when not in attendance upon him, did not wear *kami-shimo*, but had luxurious garments of the normal kimono shape. For the rare, very grandest ceremonies, the *Shogun* and his entourage wore Imperial court costume, with a hat indicative of rank.

Generally speaking, colors for samurai clothes were very dull; being mainly dullish blues grays and browns, either plain or with small patterns or stripes. The shoulder-jacket and kimono worn beneath it normally bore the wearer's family crest, his *mon*.⁷ Trousers were lined for winter wear, unlined for summer wear, the dates for the change being fixed at the fifth day of the fifth month and the first day of the ninth month. Off-duty dress was the kimono without jacket or trousers.

A *samurai* going to town for pleasure would often hide his face by wearing some sort of deep hat, often a rather comical basket-like affair, in order not to be recognized, for he might well be disobeying the rules of the establishment in which he resided.

⁵ *Shogun* is anyone of the hereditary military commanders in feudal Japan who ruled the country under the nominal rule of an emperor between the years 1192-1867.

⁶ *Daimyō* is a great feudal lord, who is a vassal of the emperor.

⁷ *Mon*, the family crest or badge; in feudal Japan, those too lowly to have their own family crest would sport that of their *daimyō* or lord. Refer to: Sian Evans, *Contemporary Japanese Design*, London: Collins and Brown, 1991, p. 218.

Another characteristic feature was the arrangement of the hair. The top of the head was shaved, with the hair at the back and sides gathered together into a queue, oiled, and then doubled forward over the crown, being tied where it was doubled over. The bunch of hair was trimmed off very neatly into a cleanly cut end. It was very important for the samurai not to have a hair out of place, and it was most embarrassing for him to have the tie become undone or cut in a sword-fight; it was even worse if the whole queue was cut off. If he was ill, he would leave the crown unshaven, and the hair would grow into a bushy mass, but he would not appear in public like this.⁸

In the peasantry society during the Tokugawa period, the cotton and hemp garments worn by the farmers varied from region to region, and to some extent with the affluence of the wearer, but considerable generalizations can be made. The full-length kimono was occasionally worn by both sexes, especially in any moments of relaxation as they had, such as taking part in some local ceremony.

The women might wear it in the house during the winter months, when there was little work too outside, or the men might sometimes wear it at work, tucking its skirts up into their narrow girdle, to give freedom of movement. But work clothes usually consisted of a short jacket worn with a trouser-like garment. In some regions the women wore ample bloomers, drawn in round the ankles, but elsewhere they wore tighter breeches, like their men folk's but usually with an apron. Both sexes wore girdles about five inches wide.

In hot weather, men could remove their jackets and work stripped to the waist, or go one step further and remove their lower garments, leaving only their loin-cloth, a piece of

⁸ Charles Dunn, *Everyday Life in Traditional Japan*, Tokyo: C.E. Tuttle Co., 1972, p. 21-3.

material passing between the legs and fixed round the hips; it, too, was subject to regional variation in style. The loincloth was usually of white cotton, but it could be red, a color which was believed to keep off demons.

Women wore an undergarment rather like a short skirt, but they did not make any concession to the warm weather other than to loosen their clothing a little to allow the air to move around their bodies. Cold weather wears included leggings, and coverings for the lower-arms, the latter with a flap to cover the back of the hands.⁹

3.22 Economic Aspects

The Japanese began to import cotton in quality in about the 15th century. By the 19th century it was being widely cultivated, soft, easy to work, had displaced hemp and other fibers in commoners' clothing, wealthy city merchants, forbidden to wear silk and detailed patterns, decorated their cotton kimonos with bold, stenciled designs. Re-dyeing, patching, and stitching were regularly used by country people to preserve their garments. Cotton is comfortable in most Japanese climates and today yields an almost unending of textiles and visual qualities.

Fabric was, is, and will continue to be important and amazing stuff for human beings. The value of fabric resides in the cost of producing or obtaining the raw material plus to expense of human imagination and labor involved in fashioning it into its final form. Japan's most important contribution to the world's textile arts, however, has probably been its dyeing and decoration techniques which throughout history have produced designs

⁹ Charles Dunn, *Everyday Life in Traditional Japan*, p. 65-6.

variously astringent, opulent, abstract, geometric and naturalistic. Sophisticated sets of seasonal, literary and cultural symbols made the fabric into a map of the wearer's personality, age and position.¹⁰

The economy of resources can be found not only in housing and cuisine, but also in clothing. By the 17th century, the basic garment for formal and casual wear of all classes was the *kosode*, which fits the description of what Westerners envision when the word kimono is used. The *kosode* was so widely adopted by the 18th century that people were calling it kimono, which means "clothing." Originally an undergarment, it became the article of clothing worn immediately under outerwear such as raingear or formal outer garments worn for government ceremonies.¹¹

Kimonos are made from one long, rectangular length of cloth cut into eight pieces; the pattern is the same for everyone, male or female, child or adult. Every inch of cloth is used with no waste. No matter how efficiently an article of Western clothing is cut, unfitted clothes there will be pieces from which nothing can be made or at least that are waste from a particular garment. One exception might be women's skirt, but they require so much more material than a kimono that they are scarcely economical. There are no buttons or hooks or any other gadgets needed to hold the kimono on.

The *obi* (the band or sash tied around the waist) is sufficient. This means that when the garment is put on, it can be adjusted for how fat or thin the wearer is as well as for how tall. In contrast, Western clothes are made to fit one person. If that person grows or gains

¹⁰ Leonard Koren, *New Japanese Fashion*, Tokyo, New York: Kodansha International, 1984, p. 66-8.

¹¹ Liza Carihfield Dalby, *Kimono: Fashioning Culture*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993, p. 32-57.

weight, the garment no longer fits, and likely as not, no one else will be the perfect fit for it. Often even hand-me-downs have to be re sewn, and in a used garment such reworking will likely show.¹²

Not only did Japanese clothing use all of a length of cloth without waste, it used a lot less cloth, particularly clothing for women. The typical skirt worn by American women grew in circumference during the course of the 19th century, from 126 inches in the 1840's, to 170 in the 1850's, and to over 190 inches by the 1860's. Fashionable dresses could be over 250 inches around, requiring seven to eight yards in length for the skirt alone. A simple skirt for everyday wear consisted of six to eight yards of material gathered onto a waistband, and though easy to sew, if the women also had to spin and weave all of this material, making a dress consumed three to four weeks.

By the 1870's, magazines such as *Harper's* were including foldout supplements of patterns with instructions, but these were extremely complex to follow and many a sad mistake must have resulted. Even the simple wrapper, worn around the house, as a maternity dress, or to receive guest, required ten yards of material twenty-eight inches in width.¹³

In contrast, the traditional *kosode* was made from a fixed length of cloth known as *ittan* to one *tan*, which was approximately fourteen inches in width and ten to twelve yards long. The current *tan* for cloth is 1,150 cm in length, or just over twelve and one-half yards

¹² Susan B. Hanley, *Everyday Things in Premodern Japan: the Hidden Legacy of Material Culture*, Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1997, p. 67-70.

¹³ Betty J. Mills, *Calico Chronicle: Texas Women and Their Fashion, 1830-1910*, Lubbock: Texas Tech Press, 1985, p. 19, 65-8.

but the Tokugawa length was usually shorter, varying by region. However, within each region the amount of cloth in a *tan* was fixed so that people could conveniently buy the amount of material they needed for one *kosode*. Thus, any *kosode* could be made for roughly half the amount of material needed for the simplest garment worn by an American woman in the 19th century. This saved not only resources but also precious time.

The Japanese way of dressing was much economical in a number of other ways. Since the basic pattern was the same for all, women could readily learn how to cut and sew everyday garments for everyone in the family. The length of the *kosode* was based on the height of its wearer, but there is extra length that is folded over at the waist under the *obi* to make the garment the correct length. By adjusting the folds, a shorter or taller person can wear someone else's clothing without any alterations. Clothing for young children allowed room for growth, and there was neither the worry that they wouldn't grow into it nor any taking down of hems.

Japanese clothing was both time and resource saving in other ways as well, since it was not ironed. Good silk garments were taken apart before laundering and laid flat on boards to dry, giving them a pressed look; everyday cotton items were hung on bamboo poles through the sleeves to let them dry straight. It is true that taking clothing apart for laundering and then sewing it up again is time-consuming, but in fuel-short Japan, this was more efficient than using heat for ironing, particularly since good outer garments were probably not washed any more frequently than was clothing in the west. One can debate whether Western or Japanese clothing was more time-efficient, but clearly Japanese

clothing was more resource-efficient.¹⁴

3.23 Social Aspects

Clothing in any society is a reflection of the standard of living and quality of life, as well as the structure of society. In the ancient style, before the changes brought about by the Meiji Restoration, the court nobility, or *kuge*, of Kyoto had one style of ceremonial dress, while the military nobles of Edo had another style as well as with people of different classes-samurai (warriors), priest, physicians, farmers, artisans and merchants.

Each class wore its own distinguishing dress. According to the Edo period's official hierarchy of social castes, the samurais stood at the top, followed by the farmers, artisans and merchants. Furthermore, there were hierarchies within each caste. All samurai were forced to live in castle towns and received income from their lords in form of rice.¹⁵

The emperor wore an *uwagi* (outer garment) with long sleeves and wide cuffs reaching almost to his ankles. This was worn over one or more undergarments plus a kind of trousers that came to the ankle. The outer garment was tightly tied at the waist by a belt and was worn either with *osode* or *kosode* (large or small sleeves), which were white or cream and made of the finest silk.

The sword was worn at the left side, attached to the waist by silk cords. The Imperial headgear, called *gyokan*, was made of lacquered silk gauze. Close fitting and flat on top, it

¹⁴ Charles Dunn, *Everyday Things in Premodern Japan: the Hidden Legacy of Material Culture*, p. 70-1.

¹⁵ Edwin O. Reischauer, *The Japanese Today: Change and Continuity*, Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1988, p. 149-153.

had a thin, stiff piece of material rising from the back. During enthronement ceremonies, or when attending the function of *Daijoe* (Great Food- Offering to the Imperial Ancestors at the Court), the emperor wore a crown set with jewels. The ministers wore a garment called *konaoshi*, of a reddish brown and similar to the Imperial garment. Robes of different colors, red, scarlet, deep green, light blue, etc-in accordance with their rank distinguished the rest of the court nobles.

The shogun, on the other hand, on ceremonial occasions wore *hitatare*, which came down over the feet and trailed behind, giving the impression of a person walking on his knees. The trousers were tied over the outer garment at the waist. His headgear, called *eboshi* (a kind of high, brimless hat), was held in place by two cords tied under the chin. It is similar to the hat worn today by *sumo* referees. The top of the *eboshi* was bent to one side-to the right for the shogun and to the left was worn by other military nobility. The sword was worn at the left side of the waist.

For full dress, the ordinary samurai class wore *kataginu* and *hambakama*, known as *kamishimo*. *Kataginu*, or “shoulder-dress,” was a kind of coat worn over the outer garment, covering the back down to the waist and draping over the shoulders, where it was folded in horizontal pleats. In front, it came down to the waist in two narrow pieces over the neckband. *Hambakama* (half-*hakama* or trousers) looked like a divided skirt reaching to the ankle. It is pleated and very full. The *haori* completed the full dress prescribed by custom for the common people. *Haori* and *hakama* constituted the ordinary visiting dress of the samurai.

Meanwhile for the ladies' full dress in Pre- Meiji Days, we could see in the court at

Kyoto and the shogun's palace at Edo, ladies wore a garment called *kouchigi* with a scarlet petticoat, letting their hair hang down their backs. The consort of the shogun wore an *itsutsu-ginu* (five-fold coat) in winter an *uchiginu*, or unlined coat, in summer. Over the coat, she wore a loose-flowing gown of ornate embroidery called *uchilake*. Among the ordinary upper classes a black silk gown stamped with the family crest was considered full dress. This was tied with a large obi at the waist, while underwear consisted of a white *habutae* gown.¹⁶

Kimono are best known for festivals, for instance *Shinto*¹⁷ festivals are generally held in summer and those participating in the procession, the majority of whom are men, wear the same navy blue *happi* coats which have festival emblems on the back and neckbands. The men twist a *tenugui* around their heads; carry a straw hat ornamented with artificial flowers on the backs and wear *tabi* without sandals.

For mourning or funeral ceremony, women wear plain black kimono with the family crest on it, black *obi* and black *zōri* while men are dressed in black kimono and haori with crest, *hakama* and black *tabi*. No fans are carried. Clothes for the dead are all white, symbolizing purity¹⁸ and cleanliness. Among special clothing indicating professions are clothes such as those worn by Shinto and Buddhist priest, and uniforms and work clothes designed to fit the job.

¹⁶ *The New Official Guide: Japan*, Japan: Japan National Organization, 1975, p. 154-5.

¹⁷ The *Shinto* religion is a native Japanese product, but it is fairly close to Chinese Daoism. The word *Shinto* means "the way of the gods," and the religion combines a simple animism, in which all kinds of natural objects possess a spirit, with a worship of great deities, like the Sun Goddess who are immortal and benevolent, but no perceivable by the human senses. Refer to: Philip J. Adler, *World Civilizations*, Minneapolis/St. Paul: West Pub. Co., 1996, p. 272-3.

¹⁸ Japanese National Commission for UNESCO, *Japan: Its Land, People and Culture*, Tokyo: Printing Bureau, Ministry of Finance, 1958, p. 905.

Since the 9th century Shinto priests have worn a white *kosode*. The same type of *kosode*. The same type of *kosode* is worn by Buddhist priests but over it they wear a black or white robe. When performing religious services they put on a silk robe, brocade surplice and a special hat.

All uniforms are Western in style and now worn by railway workers, street and bus conductor, firemen, postmen, policemen, members of the Defense Forces, nurses, university students, etc.

Farmers and peasants wear an outfit consisting of two parts- a hip-length jacket of dark blue cotton with triangular sleeves and *mompe* trousers. They also wear mittens, gaiters and rubber-soles canvas *tabi* or rubber boots when working in the mud and tie a *tenugui* around their heads over which they wear a straw hat.

The women loop a *tasuki* which is a long cord, over both arms to tuck up their sleeves and wear an apron. On rainy days, farmers wear straw cloaks but raincoats with hoods are becoming common. Woodcutters are clad in the same type of clothes as farmers except that their trousers are looser and they carry a *bandori* woven of straw or cloth on their backs to shoulder their heavy loads. In the snowy districts the people wear snow hats and shoes of straw. All working clothes are made of cotton.

Carpenters, wall painters and *tatamai* workers all have a special work suit. It is composed of a vest-like apron with a large pocket in front called *domburi* (bowl), a hip-length happi coats, close-fitting trousers and sandals. However more and more are now wearing Western type of work clothes so that these special outfits are gradually going out.

The *happi* is generally supplied by the employer and has his crest or monogram on the back and neckbands.¹⁹

3.3 Conclusion

In ancient time in Japan the Japanese Court copied Chinese court dress. Japanese clothing from as far back as the Han Dynasty (200 B.C.-200 A.D.) in China greatly resembled Chinese dress. This is not surprising since the Japanese were known to have established a strong trade with their continental neighbors.

During the Sui and Tang Dynasty (late 6th –early 10th centuries), Chinese culture provided a model for civilization throughout the Far East in the 7th century, Japan aspired to emperor hood. Previously, Japan had been a loose collection of clans. Now it strived to become like its big sister to the West. Clan leaders were gradually persuaded to declare fealty to a central figure in exchange for the colored layers and gowns of royal rank. Japanese clothing (kimono), shoes, hairstyle and paintings mainly aspired from the Chinese dynasties.

Studies of the Meiji period focus almost entirely on what was new, borrowed, “modern”, and innovative. This fact, combined with the establishment of a completely new government and national goals, has led scholars to overlook or play down the continuity to be found in the material culture, the way of life, and the standard of living during the 19th century, from well before the Restoration until several decades after it.

¹⁹ Japanese National Commission for UNESCO, *Japan: Its Land, People and Culture*, p. 906.

The study of lifestyles, consumption patterns, and material culture is important to our knowledge of the transition from Tokugawa to modern Japan: these things indicate the pace at which the transition took place, how widespread the changes were, and how long it took for the new technologies, new goods, and new ideas to be diffused. Even this short survey of the material culture of the transition years reveals much about the impact of the Meiji Restoration on the Japanese people and about how the transition worked at the grassroots level.

All evidence points to stability in lifestyles over the half-century of transition from the late Tokugawa to the turn of the 20th century. Any real changes in lifestyle (housing, food, clothing, patterns of leisure, and etc) occurred only after the turn of the century, from the Russo-Japanese War into the Taisho years. The changes that occurred during the early-Meiji period- carrying Western umbrellas or wearing Western shawls with traditional kimono, substituting glass for paper in the home- were primarily those of style and in no way constitute radical cultural shifts.

Because lifestyles remained traditional and customary, so did consumption patterns. Increases in the standard of living resulted by and large in a greater demand for traditional goods. This helped stabilize the economy; it meant that the producers of traditional goods were not suddenly out of work or technologically outdated. A good example of this is the textile industry. The new, large scale textile factories produced cloth that was too wide for kimono, so that at the same time that they contributed to an increase in the consumption of cotton cloth, they also enabled the survival of the traditional industry that produced the

material for kimono.²⁰

The introduction of new lifestyles and consumption goods can be dated from the early years of the 19th century, with a quickening of interest after the Meiji Restoration. But it was not until the turn of the 20th century that many Japanese made things Western a part of their daily lives, and the most significant change in lifestyle came only after the economic boom of World War I.

In either case was the nature of the pace of change anything like the following World War II, when the life of every Japanese was transformed within a couple of decades to a more “modern” or Western style, accompanying a dramatic rise in the standard of living. Instead, during the chaotic transition from the Tokugawa to the Meiji government, nearly all Japanese had at least one important element of stability in their lives: their everyday lifestyle.

To restate, what may have been more significant for Japanese in the 19th century than any amount of change in their lives was the continuity of the material culture and lifestyle, when people could handle rapid change most effectively when there is a strong element of stability in their lives.²¹ Meiji Japanese faced change in everything from government to the economy to education, as well as in many other aspects in their lives including fashion. When most Japanese did not have to face was a change in their daily home lives. The Meiji civil servant in their Western dress could retreat by modern transportation to their traditional homes, change into kimono, and enjoy a Japanese meal.

²⁰ Charles Dunn, *Everyday Things in Premodern Japan: the Hidden Legacy of Material Culture*, p. 168.

²¹ Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock*, New York: Random House, 1970, p. 83.

It might be hypothesized that continuity in the daily life of Japan provided a stable base that enabled the Japanese people to deal with the political, economic, and cultural change that confronted them—a base that allowed them to adopt and adapt what they wanted, rather than be overwhelmed by all that was new. This stability might provide a clue as to why the Japanese were able to modernize and industrialize effectively when so many other countries were not. Lifestyles did change over the course of the transition years, but most of the changes cannot be regarded as substantive. Only in the prewar decades of the 20th century did a transformation in the lifestyle of ordinary Japanese occur.