

## CHAPTER 4: SIGNIFICANCE OF KIMONO TO JAPANESE CIVILIZATION

### 4.1 Introduction

Developed during the Heian period (794-1185 A.D.), the kimono evolved into ornate dresses used not only as clothing but also to define one's status in Japanese civilization.

When the capital of Japan was moved from Kyoto to Edo (later renamed Tokyo) in 1615, the kimono began to be used to identify the rank of citizens. The Confucian hierarchical worldview had become popular and kimono design took off. Quickly, the kimono became more and more elaborate. Several kimonos were often worn one on top of the other, with the most intricate kimonos beneath the surface, only to be seen by the wearer's husband. Samurai warriors also wore kimono robes of different colors like uniforms to identify their loyalty as well as their rank.

With the rise of cheaper machine cloth weaving in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the kimono began to be made with this imported cloth. Simplicity and functionality began to be important concerns again in kimono design. This trend was encouraged in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the Japanese government began taxing silk production to support its military spending. Simpler kimono designs, using less fabric became the standard.

Today kimono robes are available in a range of styles and levels of complexity. Casual kimono robes or *yukatas* are made from silk, cotton and synthetic fibers.

#### 4.2 Significance of Kimono to Japanese Civilization

Kimono, which means “things to wear”, is a traditional wraparound garment made of vertical panels of cloth stitched together and bound with a sash, called an *obi*. Kimonos come in different materials, including silk, wool, cotton and linen. Their looks also differ depending on which part of Japan they came from.

Kimonos gradually disappeared from everyday Japanese wardrobes after World War II, giving way to Western style suits. But now some Japanese, including computer engineers, artists and government civil servant; have started digging them out of family closets and dressers to resurrect an ancient style and to stand out from the oceans of people in Western business attire.

Kimono is part of ordinary life of the Japanese in every way. After the Japanese lost in World War II, they somehow denied the value of all Japanese culture and tried to rebuild our country by just following capitalism form the United States. Wearing kimono makes Japanese people look more beautiful and unique. Besides, the loose robes are more suitable for Japan’s humid climate in summer.

Clothing did not change significantly and extensively for most Japanese during the second half on the 19<sup>th</sup> century, despite the great popularity of Western goods in the large cities. Even in the cities, work clothing and garments worn at home were traditional both in style and materiel. And even if Western-style clothing had been readily available, the full skirt fashionable in the West during the period would have been most impractical in Japanese housing-and impossible for women to manage in Japanese toilets, which had to be

used in a squatting position.

Western shoes were not much used because footgear had to be removed when entering a Japanese building, and the high-button styles of this period were difficult to put on take-off. Footgear did change in the Meiji period, but again the changes were the result of a diffusion of Tokugawa-period styles. Increasingly people wore something on their feet: many people switched from going barefoot to wearing straw sandals or from wearing straw sandals (*waraji*) to wooden clogs (*geta*). More women began to wear *obi*, again a Tokugawa period innovation, but even *obi* was not widely worn until after 1900.

Probably the most noticeable changes in people's appearance during the Meiji period were in hairstyles and cosmetics. Men soon began to wear Western haircuts, and as early as 1869 some 13% of the men in Tokyo had cut their hair; by 1890, it was hard to find a man in the cities with a traditional hairstyle. Women, too, changed their look: as early as 1873 the empress appeared in public with her real eyebrows and unblackened teeth; but, even so, the traditional styles lingered on for decades in the countryside.

A number of new items that were worn or carried came into common use during the Meiji period. When men cut their hair short, they began to wear caps and hats. They also carried Western-style umbrellas and watches, but their basic garb was still the kimono. Imported wool came into use for clothing. Men wore wool coats or cloaks, even over kimono, and women wore woolen shawls in winter. Eventually a special kind of coat worn over the kimono and *obi* was developed and popularized.

Obviously, people sought greater comfort during the cold months, but Western

materials and garments were adapted to traditional Japanese dress. Nonetheless, the use of wool was extremely limited until the 20<sup>th</sup> century: imported wool was expensive and the only important producer of Japanese woolen goods until after the turn of the century was a mill at Senjū in Tokyo.

The government elite began to wear Western suits in the Meiji period. In 1871 the emperor issued a mandate ordering high officials to wear Western clothes, and those in central government offices began to wear suits during business hours or on special occasions; at home, they changed back into Japanese garments, a custom that continued until recently. The widespread use of Western clothing began when the military and other groups adopted uniforms.

Women continued to wear kimono, even in the Taisho period, though by that time they too had adopted Western hairstyles. Even the uniforms of schoolgirls in the Meiji period were based on the kimono. Indeed, given Western styles for women up until about 1920, combined with the Japanese tradition of sitting on the floor, Western dress would have been most impractical for Japanese women in the Meiji and Taisho years.

Thus, style changes for men and women alike during the Meiji period, but the Western items adopted were mostly in the realm of accessories; new fabrics and new technology for producing fabrics were by and large adapted to the traditional types of clothing. And the new textile industry combined with a healthy traditional industry meant that consumers were able to afford more clothing and better quality fabrics, such as cotton

and, to a very limited extent, wool.<sup>1</sup>

As the writer has discussed in the earlier chapter, the traditional form of clothing worn in Japan is generally referred to as kimono. This term, which means simply “Japanese style clothing”, is used today to differentiate this style of attire from *yokufu*, the Western-style garments most contemporary Japanese men and women prefer to wear.

Prior to that, it was called a *kosode*, which means “small sleeves” which refers not with the length of the sleeves but the sleeve’s opening. The *kosode* actually began as an undergarment some thirteen hundred years ago, when the ladies of the court were wearing the *kasane shozoku*, the many layers of garments seen during the late Nara through the Heian period of the 8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> centuries.

This layered look is also known in more modern terms *juni-hitoe*, which literally means “twelve unlined garments”. Twelve is somewhat of an arbitrary number since sometimes up to twelve layers may have been worn. Eventually, sumptuary laws of the Edo Period standardized the number of layer to five, the outer most of which was a robe called a *karaginu*. The robe would eventually evolve into the *uchikake*. The first inner layer was the *kosode*.

This style of dress followed very strict protocols in which specific color sets of the layers took precedence over any design motifs. In fact, specific colors followed the Chinese convention of court rankings. Over the course of centuries, from the Muromachi period

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<sup>1</sup> Susan B. Hanley, *Everyday Things in Premodern Japan: The Hidden Legacy of Material Culture*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1997, p. 166-8.

onwards through the Edo period (1572-1857), the *kosode* eventually became the outer garment. The multiplayer style of sedentary court life was too restrictive for the active lifestyles of the samurai who preferred the single layer *kosode* instead. From about the late Muromachi period on, the *uchikake* became strictly a ceremonial robe worn only on special occasions. The single layer of the *kosode* freed the design aesthetic from the strict color sets of the layered style, now both color and decorative motifs were designed together.

By the mid Edo period, the ruling samurai class was feeling the financial pinch of their years of consumption. The lower class in the social strata, urban merchants and artisans called *chonin*, were becoming the wealthiest class. The shifting of economic status introduced the *nouveau riche chonin* to the self-indulgent world of the pleasure quarters of the large cities, such as the Yoshiwara in Edo, Shinmachi in Osaka and the Shimbara and Gion areas in Kyoto.

In the floating world *ukiyo* courtesan and *kabuki* actors dictated fashion. Everyone was eager to see what new costume or their favorite actor or higher-class courtesans in those areas were wearing fashion. *Ukiyo-e*<sup>2</sup>, the woodblock prints of the time, also was vehicles to display the fashions seen in those quarters.

The *chonin* would then flock to their local textile merchants to have similar styles made. Of course, the samurai did not particularly like seeing all this obvious consumption

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<sup>2</sup> *Ukiyo-e* (literally, pictures of the floating world"). A genre of art, chiefly in the medium of the woodblock print, that arose early in the Edo period (1600-1868) and build up a broad popular market among the middle classes. Subject matter tended to focus on the brothel districts and the *Kabuki* theaters, and formats ranged from single-sheet prints and greeting cards to albums and illustrations. *Ukiyo-e* flourished throughout Japan attaining their most characteristic form in the prints produced in Edo (now Tokyo) from 1680-1850s. Refer to: *Japan: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, Tokyo: Kodansha, 1993, p. 1647.

by the *chonin*, so the *shogunate* enacted sets of sumptuary laws restricting the wearing of skills and luxurious textiles. These restrictions were pretty much ignored or circumvented by the *chonin*. Often they would wear luxurious silk linings under plain cotton *kosode*.

Eventually, the sumptuary laws<sup>3</sup> were more strictly enforced, but what resulted were new inventive designs of stripes and checks in indigo and other natural tones. The laws actually aided in the creation of a new fashion aesthetic. Kimono continued to be worn until the Meiji period (1867-1912) when Western clothing styles started making their way into the daily life of Japan.

Men in particular were the first to change to Western style clothing. Although some of the adventurous, urbanite women wore western clothes, the majority of women continued to wear kimono up until World War II. However, after the war very few women wore kimono on a daily basis. Nowadays, kimonos are mainly seen only at weddings, *New Years*, *Coming of Age* ceremonies or if a person is demonstrating a cultural art such as the tea ceremony.

Patterns of making kimono are fairly simple and similar for everyone. It is essentially two widths of fabric draped over the shoulders and sewn in the back and sides. The sleeves are also folded-over widths sewn together to the other portion allowing for arm holes. There are also front pieces to allow the kimono to be wrapped and collar pieces and

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<sup>3</sup> The Japanese government began stipulating what the different classes of people could and could not spend money on from the early 7th century. These so called sumptuary laws were especially stringent and exacting in the Edo period (1615-1868), when the ruling samurai kept getting into debt with their social inferiors, the merchants and brothel keepers. Samurai clothing was carefully prescribed, and this resulted in certain fabrics being forbidden to commoners. Unable to wear brocade for example, city folk enlisted dyers, whose techniques took designs to new heights of ostentation. But regulations grew stricter, and subdued stripes, a style imported from China, became one symbol of chic Japanese fashion in the early 1700's. Refer to: Leonard Koren, *New Fashion Japan*, Tokyo: New York: Kodansha International, 1984, p. 53.

linings.

The simple pattern changes very little from individual to individual. The height of kimono is adjusted by pulling up the kimono and letting it blouse over a small sash. The outer sash which holds everything together is called an *obi*.

Many used to think kimonos are made only from silk but kimonos can actually be made from a number of different fabrics. There are different silks used, such as reeled silk, crepes, spun silk, silk gauze, leno weave gauze. In addition to silk, fabrics made of cotton, linen, and wool and now synthetic fibers are also used. Kimono are said to be either woven kimono or dyed kimono depending on whether the fabric was dyed before or after weaving. *Kasuri* (thread resist dyeing), striped, check patterns are usually pre-dyed before weaving.

Example of dyed kimono fabrics are: *katazome* (stencil rice paste resist), *roke-tsu* (wax resist), *kata komon* (stencil small design), *tegaki-zome* and *tsutsugaki* (hand drawn rice paste resist), *muji-zome* (pattern less monochrome dyeing) and *yuzen-zome* (hand drawn and stencil starch resist dyeing). *Yuzen* dyeing was an important dyeing technique to the artistry and popularity of the kimono.

It was said to have been developed by Miyazuki Yuzen who was a Kyoto fan painter around the Genroku Era (1688-1704). His rice paste resist dyeing method allowed free-hand designs to be drawn and brushed with color which gave the kimono the look of a painting. The kimono became a canvas for the design artist. *Yuzen-zome* first became the rage of Kyoto then it spread throughout the all of Japan. Another stencil dyeing process is called *bingata* which originated in Ryukyu Island (Okinawa) and was adopted by the



mainland.

The kimono is alive but not well in Japan. True, department stores have them in dazzling assortments: kimonos made of silk, cotton, synthetics; gold-threaded brocades; patterned or painted; priced from US\$ 40 to US\$ 600. True, too, that no Paris couturier can match the splendor of these garments; the bridal kimonos, in magentas, tangerines and lemon colors, are especially stunning and beautiful.

For older women there are quiet grays and indigos. From these stores, or from smart little specialty stores, or from their own sewing machines, almost all Japanese women acquire from two to two dozen- or even more-kimonos in their lifetimes. Kimonos hide bad legs and de-emphasize the breast, and expose what the Japanese regard as the sexiest part of the female body, the nape of the neck, a fetish that is supposed to be the consequence of mothers carrying small boys on their backs.

Weddings, funerals, tea ceremonies, graduations, receptions, the theater, and evenings in elegant restaurants bring out kimonos. Traditional-minded women, middle-aged or more, wear kimonos regularly on the street. Among the clusters of suburban housewives waiting on a train platform at midmorning to go to Tokyo, several will be wearing kimonos.

For the *geisha*<sup>4</sup> and for the waitress in good Japanese-style inns and restaurants, the kimono is the working costume. School after thrice-weekly lessons in kimono wearing, at

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<sup>4</sup> Geisha is Japanese woman that has been educated to accompany men as a hostess, with skills such as dancing, conversation and music. They also known as Japanese prostitutes.

US\$ 6 to US\$ 8 an hour; the main knacks are deftness in trying the *obi*, the sash, and taking the quick, short, trotting steps which are all that the hobble skirt allows.

But for most of the occasions of the Japanese women in their life- for school, for work, for parties, for shopping, for movies, for travel- the Japanese woman leaves her kimono in her closet. The great majority of Japanese women much prefer to wear Western clothes most of the time. Even on "foreign" clothes than for Japanese. Western clothes preferred by Japanese women are more French in style than American. But Japanese styles seem to have an un-Gallic modesty. Décolletage is rare, colors are muted, long sleeves and stockings are common even in summer, and mini-skirts are unusual.

Extremely popular is the jeans pants. The worldwide unisex vogue for blue denim is as all-encompassing in Japan as anywhere; it started during the American Occupation but caught on big only couple of years ago. The best jeans boutiques sell only the top brands of American-made jeans, 7 or 8 million pairs a year. Those who can't afford Levis take jeans made in Japan of American denim; and those who have to settle for third-best take jeans made in Japan of Japanese denim.

The Emperor Meiji took to Western clothes a century ago as one of his first steps in the modernization of Japan; the males of the country have mostly dressed in Western style ever since. Stores are filled with suits made in France, England, the United State, and Japan, and the customer can have anything he wants as long as it's plain, dark and dull. Actually, sobriety and uniformity seem to be the choice of the customer rather than the merchant, for the conforming salary men like all other salary men.

Like old professors, eccentric intellectuals, book publisher, super nationalists, and grandfathers-these kinds of men sometimes go out on the street or to offices men's kimonos to relax in, unless they have been converted to slacks and a loose shirt. Japanese inns provide both men and women with the *yukata*, a light cotton kimono suitable for going to and from the bath, or for sitting down to dinner, or, on a nice summer evening in a small town, for a stroll in the streets.<sup>5</sup>

Men must wear the kimono with the right side over the left, and women vice-versa. Another Japanese garment for men is the informal *jinbei*, a loose cotton jacket held closed with string ties, and shorts, invented in the 15<sup>th</sup> century as underwear for samurai.

From the writer's point of view, Japanese are well dressed. They are tidily, cleanly, soberly, warmly, and in kimonos, beautifully and exotically-dresses.

### **4.3 The Making of Kimono in Textile Industries**

To make clothes two things are required: suitable materials and suitable tools. Clothing has been made from many different types of materials, mainly skins from animals, woven cloth from animal and plant fibers, and beaten fibers. For example, all these types of particular area; the skins of fur-bearing animals in the Arctic, barkcloth in some of the Pacific islands and woven cloth over most of the temperate zone.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> William H. Forbis; (foreword by Mike Mansfield), *Japan Today: People, Place, Power*, New York: Harper and Row, 1975, p. 63-5.

<sup>6</sup> Naomi Tarrant, *The Development of Costume*. Edinburgh: National Museums of Scotland in Conjunction with Routledge, 1994, p. 3.

Archaeological research has shown that in prehistoric times cloth was produced on primitive looms from threads of cotton or from the bark of the paper-mulberry tree. Immigrant craftsmen from the continent as usual brought the stimulus to a higher technical and artistic development. According to Historical Survey, tradition Korean weavers entered the country in the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. and that Japan then learnt the culture of silk worm.

The kimono exemplifies the ancient method of dyeing, in the Tang period called *kō-kechi*, nowadays *shiborizome*. Small areas are bound off with threads before the dyeing, so that they remain uncolored.<sup>7</sup>

Originally, the kimono was undecorated because of “Buddhist conservation”, since Buddhism believes in a simple life. By the Muromachi period (1336-1568), limited embellishment was allowed due to the cultural and artistic renaissance, the period was characterized by creativity. After this period, the kimonos are dated according to “patterning and techniques”, rather than tailoring which changed minimally designers.

The designer creates the colors and “motif laden with meaning”. The design is usually subtle and monochromatic, its pattern is apparent only when light reflects off its surface. Further embellishing consists of needlework, using silk and gold-lead crapped cotton in a variety of stitches, new forms and added details are created.

The materials and techniques greatly affect the impact and final outcome of the image created; the subject matter illustrated on kimonos often falls into on of these 5

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<sup>7</sup> Martin Feddersen, (translated by Katherine Watson), *Japanese Decorative Art: A Handbook for Collectors and Connoisseurs*, London: Faber and Faber, 1962, p. 216.

categories.

The first category consist of the natural world, which is complied of seasons, flowers, birds, insects, etc. The second type of subject matter includes human-made subjects like fans, bridges and buildings. A third category consists of imaginary based on well-known poems, literature, folk tales and legends easily recognized. The forth subjects matter is symbols from Chinese Confucianism and Japanese Buddhism. The last category is small, intricate geometry patterns usually based on nature. Example of such patterns includes mountain motifs, tortoise shell grids and thunder bolt zigzags.

The images on kimono are complex and varied. Dyeing, painting, applied metallic leaf and needlework are some techniques used to create the images. More than one artist is typically included in creating a kimono. Each artist is a specialist in certain techniques.<sup>8</sup>

A late development of the designer's art is the paper stencils used for printing cotton and silk, generally using an indigo dye. The paper used for these made from the bark of the paper-mulberry tree, stiffened and made water-proof with the juice of the date plum and oil, whereby sixteen sheets of paper of the same size laid close one above the other.

The pattern is drawn onto the top sheep, and is cut out with a special tool down the whole pile in one operation. The top and bottom pages are unusable, but the remaining fourteen are stuck together as a pairs: a sheet is laid out and covered with sticky paste, and then a very fine net of human hair or silk is spread on, followed by a second sheet of the

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<sup>8</sup> Peter Swann, *A Concise History of Japanese Art*, New York and Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1979, p. 292-5.

paper which fits exactly over the design however elaborate. The net prevents the stencil from tearing.

Some stencils are silhouettes in negative, but the majorities are positive. With negative silhouettes the stencil can be brushed over with the blue dye, and the design comes out blue on a white ground. If the silhouette is positive the stencil is painted with a resist, which only touches the parts of the cloth not covered by the stencil.<sup>9</sup>

The cloth is dyed in the vat<sup>10</sup> of indigo, and when the resist is washed out, carrying the dye with it, the design again remains in blue on a white ground. For a white pattern on a blue ground the color is applied direct to the positive stencil, and the resist is used with the negative.

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<sup>9</sup> Martin Feddersen. (translated by Katherine Watson), *Japanese Decorative Art: A Handbook for Collectors and Connoisseurs*, p. 217.

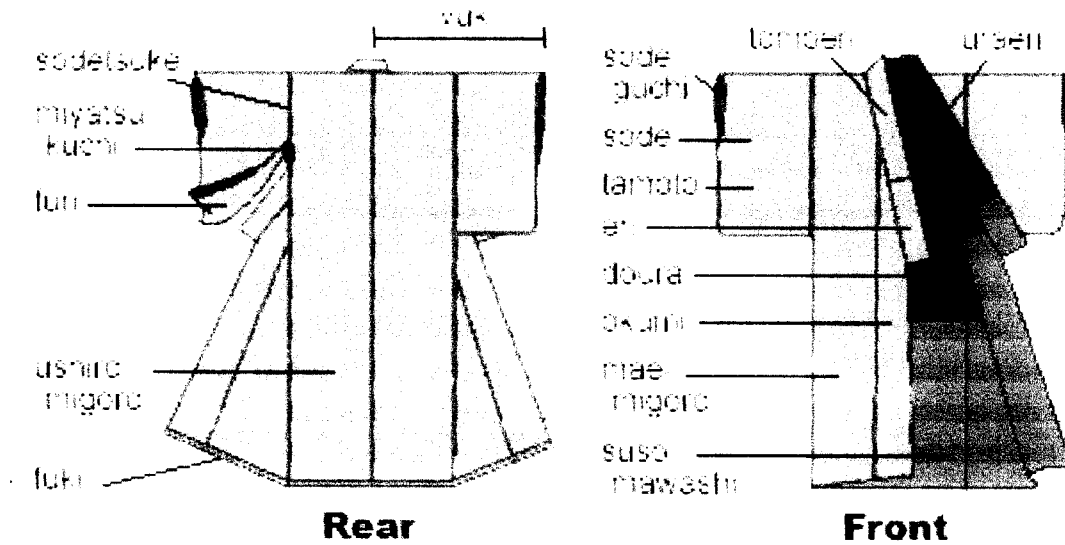
<sup>10</sup> The historic dyes of Japan fall into two classes- vat dyes and mordant dyes. Vat dyes, of which indigo is the original and most important example, are dyes that must first be converted by reduction (a process that removes oxygen from the liquid in which the dyestuff has been mixed) into a soluble form. When the cloth that has been immersed in the dye solution is removed and exposed to the air, the dye is oxidized and fixed on the cloth's fibers. The process of reduction is carried out through the addition of certain chemicals to an alkaline solution containing the dyestuff. The large vessel and the dye bath that it contains are both referred to as the vat, and the process of preparing the dye bath is called vatting. Vats are differentiated by the method or chemical used in the reduction process, for example, fermentation vat, zinc-lime vat, and hydrosulphite vat. Vat dyes will successfully dye cellulosic fibers- cotton, linen, hemp, and viscose rayon- as well as the protein fibers of silk and wool. Refer to: Yoshiko Wada, Mary Kellogg Rice and Jane Barton, *Shibori: The Inventive Art of Japanese Shaped Resist Dyeing: Tradition, Techniques, Innovation*, Tokyo and New York: Kodansha International, 1988, p. 276.

#### 4.31 Weaving and Dyeing

All kimonos are the same shape and are of a standard size that can be worn by anyone, man or woman, regardless of height or weight. This gives the kimono adaptability not found in typical or common western dress.

Unlike western dressmaking with its varied and sometimes individual patterns, the kimono is made from a single basic pattern. When kimono cloth is being woven or cut or sewn, it is always perfectly straight and flat, and the finished garment can be taken apart and then resewn into its original form, as is done when a kimono is cleaned. This simplicity of form makes it possible for the kimono, and the *obi*, *haori* and *hakama* as well, to be folded in a flat rectangular shape for storage. The basic pattern of the kimono, its parts and standard size is shown on next page.

Picture 7: Parts of the Kimono



**yuki** – sleeve length  
**ushiromigoro** - rear section  
**uraeri** - inner collar  
**Doura** - upper lining

**Sodetsuke** - armhole seam  
**fuki** - hem guard  
**sode** – sleeve  
**okumi** - front panel below the collar

**Miyatsukuchi** - opening below armhole  
**sodeguchi** - sleeve opening  
**tamoto** - sleeve pouch  
**maemigoro** - front main section

**Furi** – sleeve below armhole  
**tomoeri** - over collar  
**eri** – collar  
**susomawashi** - lower lining

Adapted from: <http://web.mit.edu/jpnet/kimono/index.html>



A multitude of variations in women's kimono are achieved through the use of many kinds of textiles and patterns. Textiles may be natural- silk, cotton, linen, wool-or, nowadays, synthetic fabrics. Patterns, handmade or machine-made, are produced by many methods: weaving, hand-painted or stencil dyeing,<sup>11</sup> tie-dyeing, embroidery or a combination of techniques. Weaving kimono textiles is done by hand today, but as with other arts and crafts, this method is very expensive, so the majority of kimono fabrics are now made by machine.

Kimonos are classified according to whether the dyeing process is done before or after the dyeing process is done before the weaving process (*saki-zome* or *atozome*).

Pre-dyed (*saki-zome*) kimonos are referred to as woven kimono. The designs are symmetrical or geometric, such as stripes checks or the splash pattern known as *kasuri*. These are customarily broken down into following types:

Silk: reeled silk (*meisen* or *habutae*), heavy crepe (*omeshi*), spun silk

(*tsumugi*), silk gauze (*sha*) and leno weave gauze (*ro*).

Cotton: splash pattern (*kasuri*), stripe pattern (*shima*) and check (or lattice)

(*kōshi*).

Linen :(*jōfu*)

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<sup>11</sup> Japanese stencils for stencil dyeing are an art form in themselves. Layers of handmade mulberry paper are reinforced and water profaned with persimmon tannin, then cut by master craftsmen into delicate and intensive stencils who designs are based on the natural world. A stencil is placed on the fabric, paste resists is applied with a spatula, and the stencil removed the fabric is dyed. When the paste resist is set, then the paste is washed away after dyeing is completed. Stencil resist of this kind result in designs of great refinement and beauty. Refer to: Amy Sylvester Katoh, *Japan Country Living: Spirit, Traditional, Style*, Rutland, Vt.: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1993, p. 175.

Woven kimonos are also made of wool or synthetic fabrics. Kimonos dyed after weaving the cloth (*ato-zome*) are referred to as dyed kimono. These free-style designs and motifs first became popular during the long Edo period, as innovative developments occurred in dyeing and decorating techniques. There are many kinds, classified by the design process:

Design dyes on white fabric (*gera-zome*)

Hand-painted designs (*tegaki-zome*): Yūzen, batik (*rōke-tsu*) and others.

Stencil designs (*kata-zome*): hand drawn Yūzen designs (*kata Yūzen*), small

stencil designs (*kata komon*), small monochrome patterns (*Edo komon*),

polychrome dyeing over stencil resist (*bingata*), and medium-size stencils

(*chū-gata*, use only for *yukata*).

Tie-dye (*kasuri-zome*)

Pattern less monochrome dyeing (*muji-zome*).

Many textile techniques have reached a high level of sophistication in Japan. Two that are especially important traditionally, and are still in use today, are *tsumugi* (spun silk) and *Yūzen*, a starch-resist dyeing technique unique to Japan.<sup>12</sup>

Japan's representative "Yūzen dyeing" (*Yūzen-zome*) and known dyeing (*komon-zome*) with an explanation of their respective history and characteristic.

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<sup>12</sup> Norio Yamanaka, *The Book of Kimono*, Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1982, p. 42-4.

The techniques of *Yūzen* dyeing<sup>13</sup> were established about 300 years ago when hand-painted patterns were transferred to silk fabrics for the first time in Japan. *Yūzen* dyeing enable fabrics to be dyed in refreshingly multicolored. Even today, *Yūzen-dyed* kimono with bright color tones are extremely well liked and evaluated as high quality products representative of Japan.

On the other hand, *komon-zome*, which has the meaning of “small-figured designs”, has a tradition of about 400 years. It started as a method of transferring the family crest to the “*Kamishimo*”, the ceremonial at the Japanese Court for the warrior class. Upon entering the Edo period (1603-1867), *komon* dyeing gradually spread among the people in general. This *komon* dyeing is a traditional technique of high quality that makes use of stencils cut in intricate patterns.

These two dyeing methods, *Yūzen* dyeing that is luxuriantly dynamic and as beautiful as a painting and *komon* dyeing that possesses a geometrically quiescent beauty-are each a dyeing method representative of Japan. They're traditional handicraft techniques that continue to lobe each today in the exquisite Japanese kimono.

The weaving of cloth was widespread in country district as an occupation for the womenfolk on a farm, and a large proportion of the hemp-and cotton weaving, and the plainer sort of silk weaving, was done in this way. The material was produced in standard tolls, measuring about two feet by 20 yards, each of which was enough to make one kimono.

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<sup>13</sup> *Yūzen* dyeing is a complex method of polychrome fabric decoration using paste as the resist medium. The paste is applied with a cone-shaped applicator or through stencils, and dyes are applied with small brushes. Highly popular in the Edo period (1615-1868) and still widely practiced today.

The process of making up the material required a certain amount of skill, to accommodate it approximately to the size of the wearer, but in view of the fact that the garment has no buttons or other fastening, but is held together by the girdle, while the woman's kimono is adjusted by a large or smaller tuck under the wide girdle, the services of a professional dressmaker were not needed by a normal household, especially as the stitching is not the fine stitching of the West, but it is more like tacking. Washing a kimono involved taking it to prices, washing and starching them separately, on frames, and reassembling, changing round the pieces to distribute wear.

Silk cloth was often highly decorative. It could have various textures and damask effects, and also patterns derived from the use of differently colored thread, worked in at the time of weaving. It could have patterns dyed in after weaving, either by a process similar to painting, whereby colors were brushed on to the fabric, or by knot-dyeing, in which small areas of the cloth were drawn up into bunches before the whole was immersed in the dye; when the bunches were undone, there was left a small area in the original color. Finally, design could be embroidered on the fabric to produce brocade.

Whereas various regions of Japan could produce patterned weaving, complicated dyeing and embroidery was done in towns, the most celebrated area being Nishijin, a district in the northwest of Kyoto, with a long history of work for the court, and later for the Shogun.

The isolation of Japan until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century preserved, until a period when Europe and America were well into era of mass production, a tradition of handicraft which Europe had known some century's earlier but had now nearly forgotten. While in

their own specialties the best craftsmen were probably not inferior to those of Japan, it can be claimed that the demand by the warrior class for articles which their cult of simplicity required should be elegant and tasteful, coupled with the size of this demand (which may well have been greater than that of the aristocratic patrons of the West), meant that craft products in Japan were on the whole superior to their Western counterparts.

From the beginning of the Edo period, many new colors and dyeing processes were being introduced. The use of plain colors was governed not only by aesthetic considerations but also by ritual, even to some extent by protocol, as from ancient times when colors were officially prescribed as an index of rank. From the *hierarchy of colors*,<sup>14</sup> predominant colors were brilliant red, purple, and blue. Orange, yellow, and green played minor roles and continue to do so today.

White as a ceremonial color was very popular in the masculine fashion world, especially after 1650. The special badge of the Tokugawa *hatamoto* (banner men) was the use of braided white cords on their sword hilts. They also wore white *haori* (topcoats) and *hakama* (wide trousers), and this style was imitated by all who admired their courage and bravado.

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<sup>14</sup> The *Hierarchy of Colors* was the color of dyes that Japanese court and aristocracy chose to symbolize rank and authority. Early on, in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, a system of 12 courtly ranks was established in an effort to create a strong imperial bureaucracy. Each rank was distinguished by the color of the headdress or cap assigned to that rank. 6 basic colors are believed to have been involved, with purple indicating the highest rank and white and black the two lowest. Later, from the 7<sup>th</sup> on into the 9<sup>th</sup> century, rank and precedence were indicated chiefly by the color of courtly robes. Although the order of the colors varied slightly from period to period, a deep purple remained supreme in every age. The color of the clothing worn by aristocrats of each class was also dependent on rank, and in principle no one was allowed to use colors appropriate to ranks higher than their own, though they were free to use colors of lower ranks. Persons of the lower ranks, with neither position nor official post, wore a uniform dress in yellow. Since in China the color yellow was symbolic of the emperor, it seems evident that this ranking of colors was not simply an imitation of Chinese custom, but embodied a purely Japanese value system. Even today they continue to exert a certain influence on the way the Japanese evaluate colors. There were two other colors that ranked still higher- yellowish brown and orange, whose use was restricted to the emperor and crown prince respectively. Refer to: Holly Littlefield, *Colors of Japan*, Minneapolis: Carolrhoda Books 1997, p. 99.

The costume of another band of young fighting men was a single white kimono of heavy *chirimen* crepe, rather heavily wadded, and a white *obi* wound three times around the waist. This kimono was cut rather short, and weights were sewed in the bottom corners to make the fling out as the wearer walked, thus emphasized his boastful swagger. This can often be seen in historical plays given on the stage today. They also wore a very long sword, all the ornaments of which were white.

Pure white was much used for under kimono with ceremonial costume. Indeed, linings and under kimono were almost always white until rather late in the 17<sup>th</sup> century when, because of general peace and opulence, gayer colors were popular. The *kuge* (court nobles), the daimyo, and many of the samurai wore white undergarments, but this custom was forbidden to the merchant classes. Women of this period were also partial to white undergarments for ceremonial wear, and some quite extravagant white kimonos were worn by the courtesans.

Certain of the bright pure reds-*beni* (vermilion), *hi* (crimson), and *aka* (scarlet) - were also used for ceremonial costumes, especially for weddings. A part of the wedding ceremony was the *iro-naoshi* or "changing of color." At the beginning of the ceremony the bride wore a pure white kimono as a symbol of virgin chastity and, under it, first another white kimono and, under this, a kimono of bright red, symbolizing happiness and good fortune. Then she changed into an elaborately colored and designed kimono, still remaining the red under kimono. Today, as in the past, red is still favored for under kimono on ceremonial occasions.

A fashion became gayer during the Edo period, red linings and under kimono

superseded white. For a time, red was seldom worn in outer kimono except by samurai women, because few as yet had the courage to display such brilliance in the full light of day. *Daughters of samurai, and even the older members of the family, liked to wear red because it was a brave color but also because they thought it extraordinary becoming.*

In the gay days of Genroku, ladies often copied the classic Ashikaga fashion of wearing brilliant red *hakama* (divided overskirts) with a white *kosode*. This is still the costume of Shinto priestesses, and even maidservants at open-air teahouse still remind us of it with their bright red aprons.

*Akane*, a very different, purplish red, was made from the roots of a wild grass that grew in the province of *Totomi* and was also found occasionally in the surrounding area of Kyoto. Discovered as early as Fujiwara, and much worn in Ashikaga, it became so common in the early thrifty days of Tokugawa because of its cheapness that one who wore it in Genroku's flashy days was an object of scorn and ridicule, especially to the younger generation.

Purple was always a symbol of highest rank. Some priests who made generous gifts of money to the poor puppet emperor in 1613 were rewarded with the privilege of wearing purple robes. When the shogun heard of it, he was enraged at the emperor's presumption, and to show that he alone had power to bestow the purple, he threw these entire priests into prison. From that time until the modern era, the priests of only two or three temples dared to wear purple. In the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, however, certain courtesans of especially high rank were permitted to wear this color of distinction and were designated by a name which meant "wearers of the purple."

In Genroku, purple as a fashionable color was superseded by pale blue, but dull blue, the shade called *asagi*, was always considered commonplace. If a woman wore this color it meant that she cared more for her duties as a good housewife than she did for fashion or society, and the men who wore *asagi* were ridiculed as rustics. The only exception to this were certain young actors who found it so becoming that they made bold to wear it in their under kimono. From early times very dark blue was never a color for high-ranking personages but was worn mostly by coolies and servants and considered wholly outside the pale of fashion. Just one exception was the very long *haori* of dark-blue *chirimen* crepe which was worn by all physicians as a mark of their profession.

Bright yellow was fashionable in early Tokugawa but went out of style soon after 1670. In Genroku, however, broad stripes of yellow and tan, also plaids of these two colors became very popular. Brown began to be fashionable shortly before Genroku, when about a hundred variations were listed, but the most popular were the light golden browns. This color was much used for *obi* by both men and women. The Japanese say that brown is the sign of prosperous times; gray and dark colors are for times of pained as solemn.

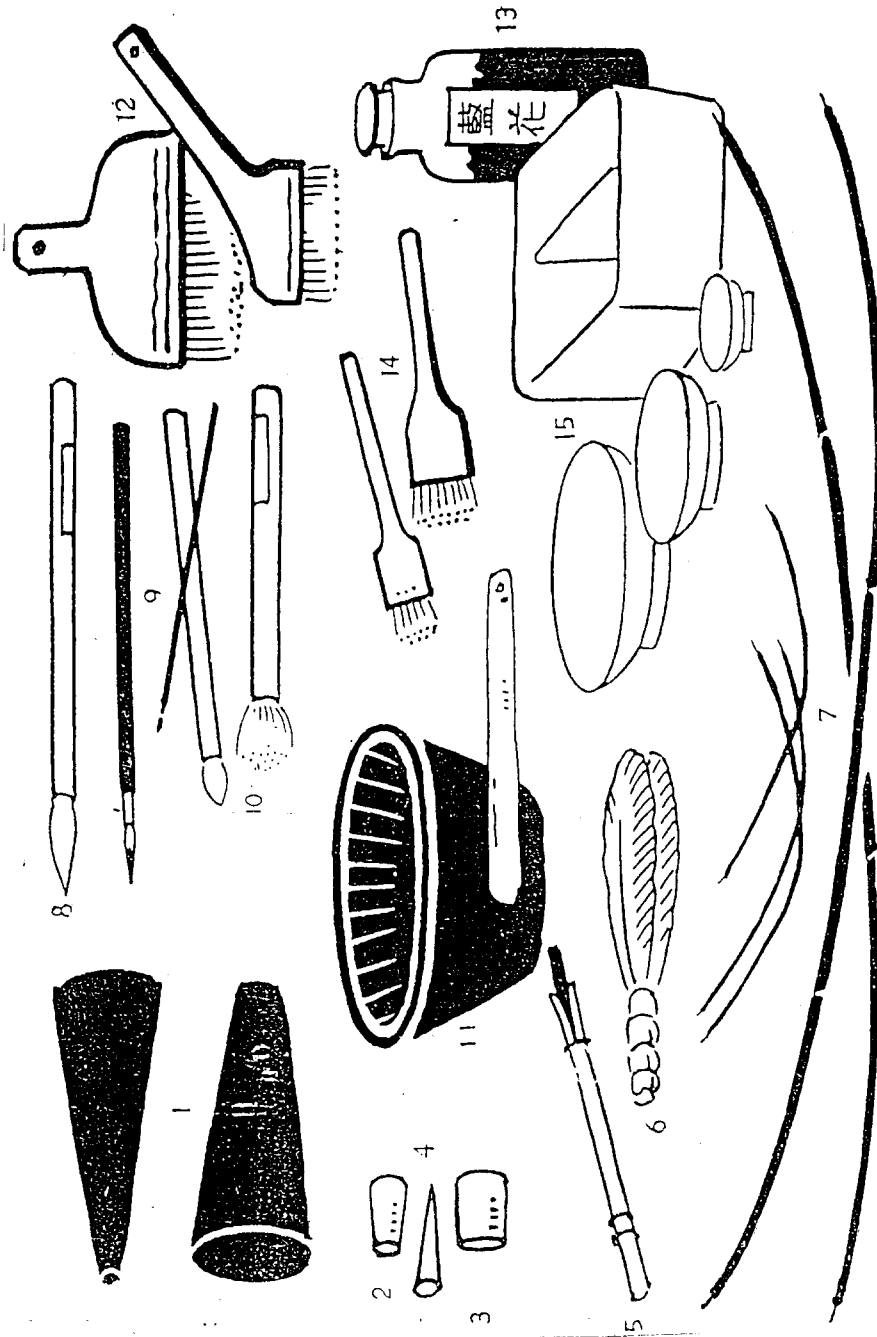
In Genroku, notorious through it was for costume splendor, black was the ceremonial color most generally worn by the upper classes. Even royalty wore kimono of black *habutae* with the customary five crests, and samurai were officially required to wear black *haori*. In all cases it was a distinguished foil for all the bright colors that had become so popular even in modern days.<sup>15</sup> (Refer: Picture 6 and Picture 7)

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<sup>15</sup> Helen Benton Minnich. *Japanese Costume and the Makers of Its Elegant Tradition*, Rutland, Vt.: C.E. Tuttle, 1963, p. 341-2.



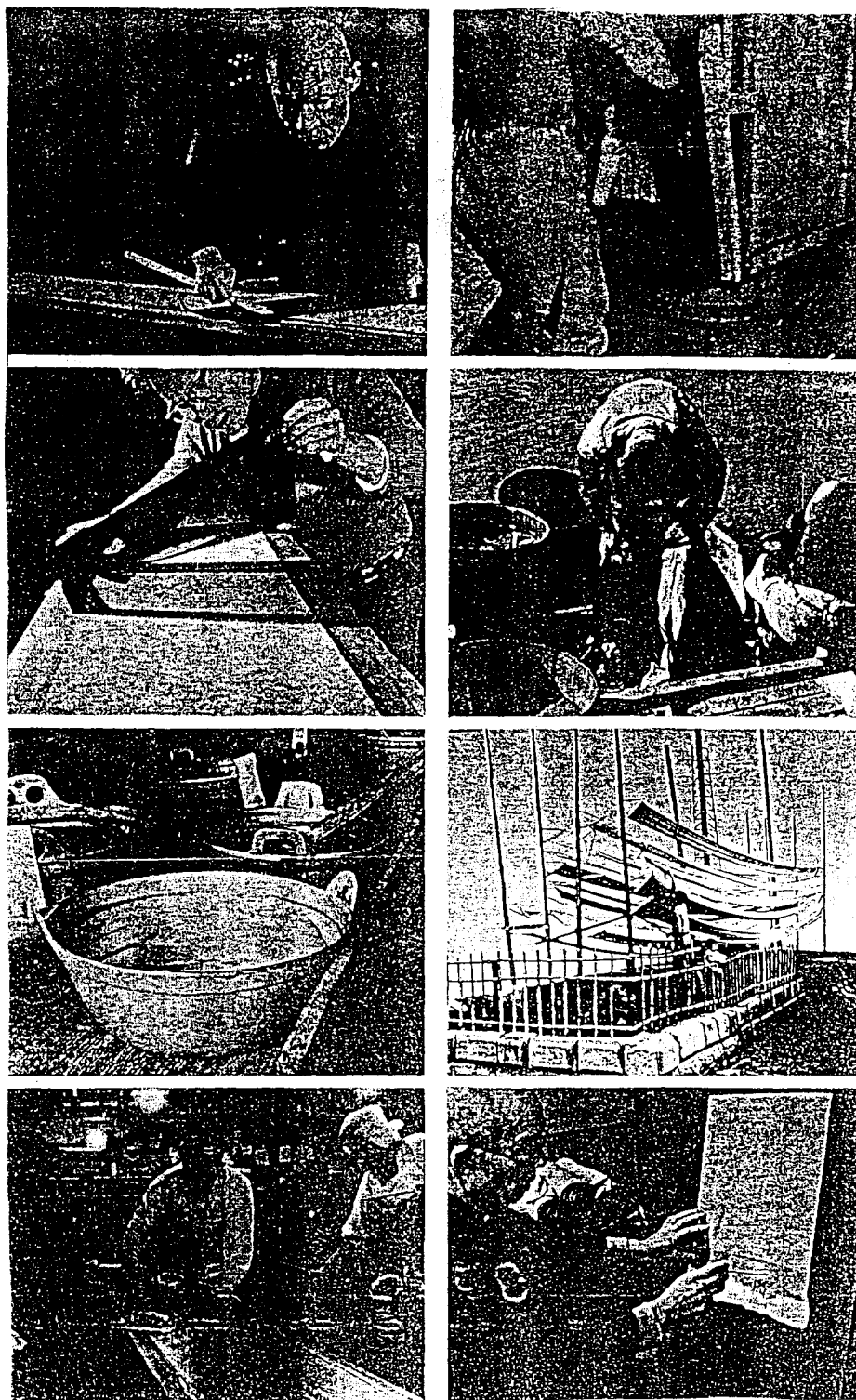
Picture 8: The Making of Kimono



1. Paper funnel for applying rice-paste.
2. & 3. Brass protectors for end of funnel.
4. Brass pointed tube attached to end of funnel for applying paste.
5. Charcoal, for sketching design.
6. Feather for removing charcoal sketching.
7. Fine bamboo sticks called "shinshi" used to stretch material.
8. Brush for applying tracing fluid.
9. Fine brushes for finishing retouching.
10. Brushes for painting the design.
11. Mortar and pestle for crushing soya beans.
12. Brushes used for applying soya-bean liquid and also in painting background.
13. Tracing fluid.
14. Brushes for painting the design.
15. Painting dishes.

Adapted from: Lynn Katoh, *Kimono: Artistic Designs and Hand-Dyeing Significance in Colors*

Picture 9: The Making of Edo-komon



The making of *Edo-komon*. From left down: (1) the late Yasusuke Komiya, designated an Intangible Cultural Asset, applying a stencil to silk material,\* (2) lifting the stencil, (3) mixing of colors, (4) applying for printing, (5) steaming in a cauldron, (6) washing dyed silk, (7) drying and (8) Yasusuke Komiya, inspecting finished *komon*.

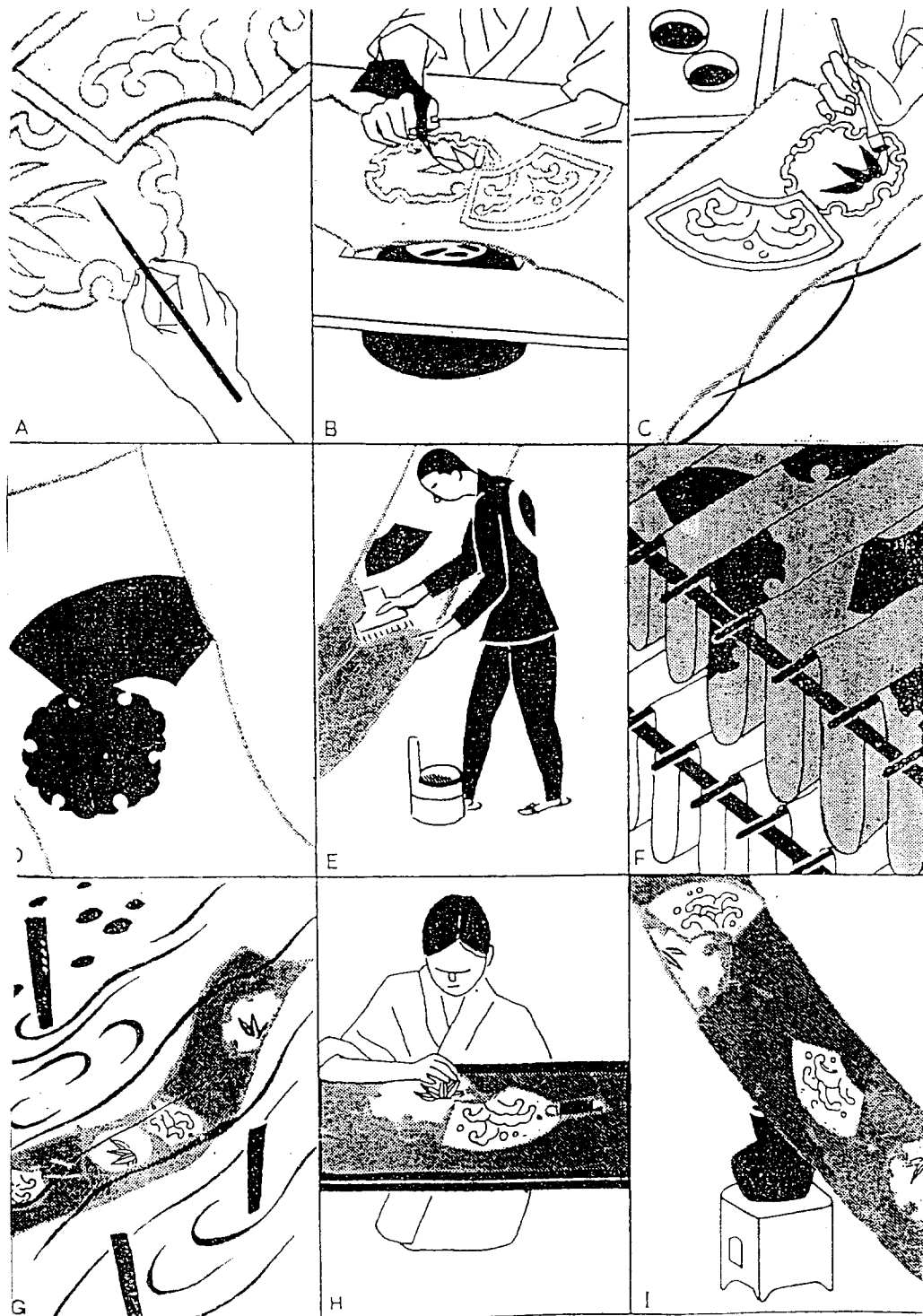
Adapted from: Lynn Katoh. *Kimono: Artistic Designs and Hand-Dyeing Significance in Colors*, Tokyo: Foreign Affairs Association of Japan, 1962, p. 12.

#### 4.4 The Artistry of the Kimono

In Japan, there was no clear distinction between the fine arts and decorative arts as there is in Western countries. Artists of the Edo period would often lend their artistic talents of the decoration of different media such as ceramic, lacquer ware, and also *kosode* or kimono.

The artistry of the kimono is the culmination of the highest level of the artistic brush, textile production, dyeing and embroidery techniques. It was the textile, dyeing and embroidery artisans that were challenged to come up with fresh designs. Many of these designs were documented in books that were used notes for other artisans working on the kimono. *Kosode* or kimonos were not only considered art that you wore but art itself. Often leftovers of *kosode* were mounted onto painted screens as part of decorative design of the screen, usually applied to a painted *iko*, kimono stand. (Refer: Picture 10)

Picture 10: The Artistry of Kimono



A. Tracing design with *tsuyu-kusa* fluid. B. Applying rice-paste over the tracing line. C. Painting design. D. Design covered with rice-paste. E. Painting in background. F. Material hung in steaming closet. G. Removing rice-paste and tracing line in running stream. H. Embroidering. I. Steaming for finishing.

Adapted from: Lynn Katoh, *Kimono: Artistic Designs and Hand-Dyeing Significance in Color* Tokyo: Foreign Affairs Association of Japan, 1962, p. 6.

Patterns design motifs,<sup>16</sup> color selection, embroidery, and type of fabric were all important considerations in kimono making. Beyond the artistic depiction of the design, the motif may have important emotional meaning to the owner. Designs may be allusions to Chinese classics or *Noh* plays, establishing a certain cultural status for the wearer. Designs may have auspicious meaning as well. For example, tortoise and crane designs represent longevity, fans represent prosperity, bamboo represents flexibility, and pine trees symbolize loyalty.

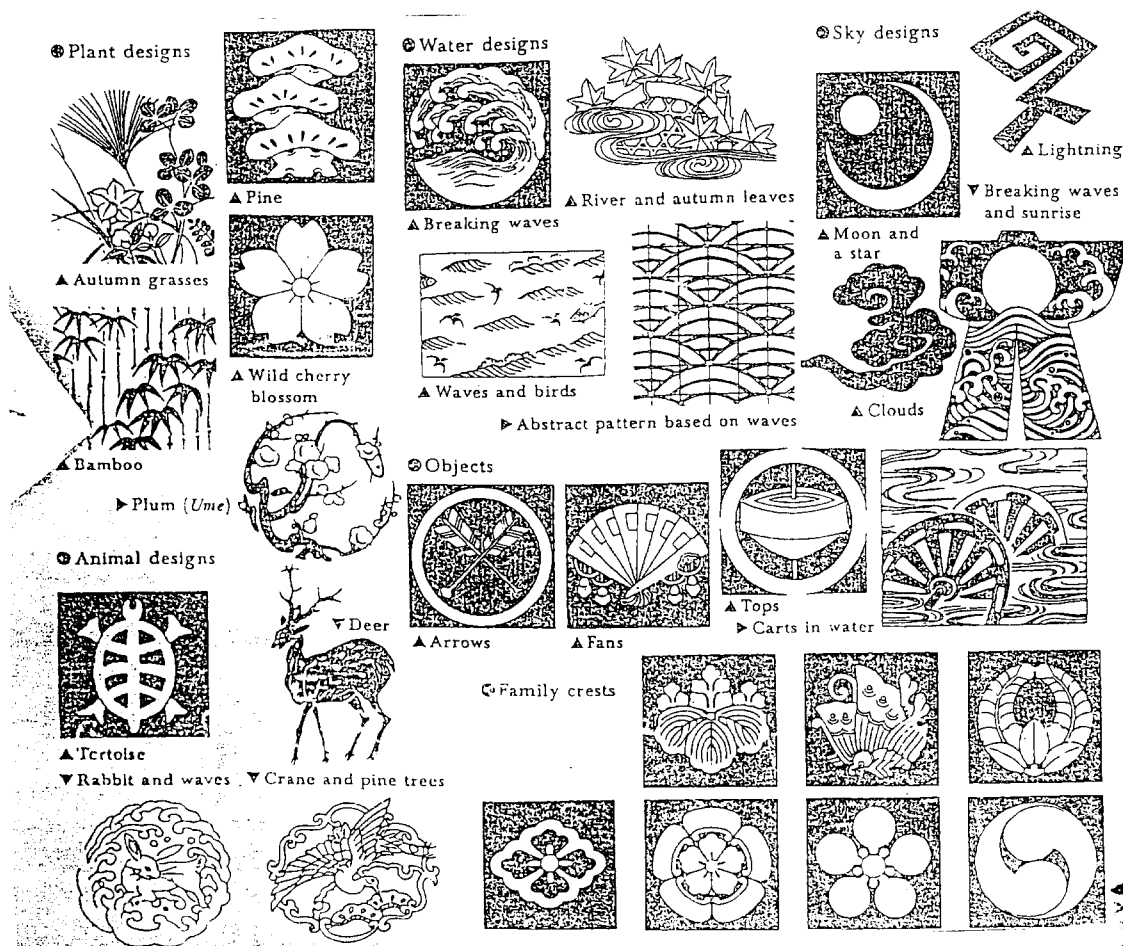
Colors are equally important in evoking feelings and mood. Everyone understood the allusions associated with the colors worn. Reds were considered sensual, and purple had an undying love connotation. Colors also had seasonal appropriateness: white and green for early spring; pink, lavender and green for late spring; yellow with maroon for summer; purple or red with white for the fall.

Of course, many of these color combinations followed the seasonal flowers, which were the most common motifs used to designate the seasonal dress codes. If a kimono is painted with a silver decoration (silver being a cool color) it is usually a summer kimono. *Shochikubai*: pine, plum, and bamboo motifs are only seen in the winter, *sakura* cheery blossoms in the spring, iris in the early summer, chrysanthemums and red maples in the fall. All the colors associated with these plants and flowers have their seasonal appropriateness. (Refer: Picture 11)

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<sup>16</sup> Traditionally pattern design motifs for kimono normally taken from nature, generally those taking nature as their theme such as cherry blossoms in spring, running water in summer, red leaves in autumn, and snow in winter. Such patterns have grown out of the deep love for and contemplation of nature. Refer to: Edward Seidensticker, *A Pictorial Journey to Japan's Cultural Treasure: The Beauty of Japan*, Tokyo: Gakken Co. Ltd, 1990, p. 91.

Picture 11: Patterns and Designs



Adapted from: Edward Seidensticker, *A Pictorial Journey to Japan's Cultural Treasures*:

*The Beauty of Japan*, Tokyo: Gakken Co. Ltd, 1990, p. 90.

Color sensibilities changed over the years as well. After the sumptuary laws were enacted and enforced, certain colors could only be worn by certain people. Reds made of safflowers, *benibana* which was very expensive, were only to be worn by samurai class. Purple was restricted to the court and the upper echelon of the clergy. Dyers were clever in using substitute dyes for the reds and purples, thereby circumventing the restrictions.

But the laws eventually had their impact as more white ground was employed, then eventually the bright colors shifted into more somber shades of indigo blues and browns, first worn by *kabuki* actors, and then adopted by the townspeople. Even the nobility, who were free to wear restricted clothing, chose the more somber colors, mostly influenced by the style of dress and frugal nature of Shogun Tokugawa Yoshimune. Of course, these restrictions were removed when the shogunate was abolished, but by the subdued colors had already become ingrained into the aesthetic of Japan.

Over the course of the Edo period, design changes were dictated by the fashion of the moment. In the early part of the Edo period, *kosode* or kimono the majority of the design covered the back. From the middle toward the latter part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the design on the back swept from the seam of left sleeve to the middle of the right sleeve and then the design would sweep down to the hem from bottom of the right sleeve.

The design changed in the latter 17<sup>th</sup> century when the design swept from the left top shoulder sleeves to the bottom of the right sleeve. Over successive decades the design in which they again took up more area on the back of kimono. These are called the *Kanbun* style, after the era in which they were the most prominent. This progression of design continued until the early 1700's when the obi became the center of attention.

The widening *obi* changed the designs on kimono since it broke up the plain of the *kosode* or kimono into two sections. After the mid 1700's, the kimono design areas were sectioned off to top and bottom due to the width of the *obi*. This style lasted until the latter 18<sup>th</sup> century, and then the designs were placed on the hems of the *kosode* or kimono. During the remainder of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the hem and outer edges of the kimono were the areas of decoration, with the *obi* commanding the majority of attention. With the *obi* decoration became as elaborate as the kimono. All the skill accumulated through the centuries by dyers, weavers, and embroiders were used to make *obi*.

Kimono which are made from the finest silks, dyed in the *yuzen-zome* style and are hand embroidered are extremely expensive probably comparable to the *haute couture* of Paris. It is not uncommon for a fine kimono to cost in the ¥30,000 to ¥60,000 range which is why kimono rentals are more popular than purchased in Japan these days. A collection of kimono and *obi* was quite an investment, which is why a geisha would spend a good portion of her life paying off that debt.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Amy Vladeck Heinrich (ed.), *Currents in Japanese Culture: Translations and Transformations*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997, p. 337.



#### 4.5 Conclusion

Over the years the Japanese culture influenced and contributed a lot to the world such as kimono. The kimono was a very important piece of clothing in Japan's culture. The main reason why the kimono was such an important piece of clothing is because it was worn depending on the weather. The kimono wasn't worn on special occasions only, it was worn everyday. This is a very significant in Japanese culture.

Most of the motifs decorating kimono of the Edo period until modern days seem to reflect the world in which the people who wore them actually lived. Images of the flowers, grasses and trees common to the hills of Yamato and the familiar animals and birds inhabiting them, landscapes of seashore and lake front, mountains and riverbanks, meandering streams and wooded islands shrines and temples, mansions and thatched huts, bridges and blocks a mortars, fishnets and buckets appear to have been plucked from the matrix of rural and urban lives. In fact many-perhaps most- of them derive from the richly visual imaginary classical Japanese literature.<sup>18</sup>

Textiles are perhaps the greatest treasure in Japan's remarkable century old tradition of handicrafts. The Japanese techniques of weaving and dyeing were originally borrowed from Korea and China. In the 8<sup>th</sup> century, tribute between Japan and her neighboring countries, Korea and China was presented in both of silk and brocade. Over the centuries, the Japanese treasured and studied those textile offerings and began producing their own. The Japanese have developed it to a level rarely seen elsewhere. The unmatched skills and refined aesthetic have combined to produce some of Japan's finest treasure until today.

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<sup>18</sup> Amy Vlodeck Heinrich (ed.), *Currents in Japanese Culture: Translations and Transformations*, p. 337.