

CHAPTER 5: THE EFFECTS OF KIMONO DEVELOPMENT IN JAPANESE CIVILIZATION

5.1 Introduction

The word kimono was invented in the Meiji Era (1868-1912). This was a time of great openness in Japan after nearly three centuries of self-imposed seclusion policy. When passed by foreigners to name their native style of dress, they used the word “kimono” which means simply “clothing.”

Although Western-style dress has 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 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 unmanageable than Western-style dress, which is less restrictive in movement and easier to take care of.

Western styles have been the main dress code in Japan since the 1800's, but the kimono is still traditional wear. Even in the 21st century, this ankle length gown with long plays a role in Japanese culture and mostly worn on special occasions.

5.2 The Effects of Kimono Development in Japanese Civilization

Japan is more than herself. She is Asia and Europe in one. No people can boast of a purely autochthonous culture.¹ The Japanese, often called the most polite people in the world, possess an elaborate code of etiquette which often baffles the Westerners.

Japanese society and culture experienced a radical transformation after the opening of the outside world in the mid-19th century and again during the military occupation following the Pacific War. The Kimono dominated the Japanese way of dress until the Meiji period when Western clothing was introduced to Japan. Before World War II, Western clothing was worn only by the rich, aristocrats and high educated people. This upper class in Japan during this period imitated European fashions mainly through what they saw in cinema

The writer's believe this is the beginning of the Japanese tendency to glorify Western things. Western things were seen as fashionable and elegant then and still are today where designs by Giorgio Armani and Calvin Klein dominate what is "in" Japan's fashion industries today.² When evidence shown, preserving Western thing is reflected today in Japanese fashion magazines by the constant portrayal of Western models compared to the insufficiency of Asian models.

The Meiji Period was also a time where Japan was becoming modernized and

¹ Inazo Notobe, et.al., *Western Influence in Modern Japan: A Series Papers on Cultural Relations*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931, p. 1.

² *Japan: an Illustrated Encyclopedia*, Tokyo: Kodansha, 1993, p. 212.

“westernized”.³ Japan was on her way to becoming a major economic power globally. Emergence of Japan into the fashion world signifies its position as an advanced capitalist power and cultural leader. Only developed nations such as United State, United Kingdom, France and Japan participate in high fashion since fashion is born out of highly developed 1st World countries with major urban centers.

In the early 1980`s, Japanese fashion designers were introduced to the international scene. Japanese designers are seen as imitators of Western design. However, in reality they tremendously influenced fashion since they emerged in the early 1980`s. The shocked fashion critics with their innovative designs, and they continue to do so even today and moving a step advance ahead. The Japanese designers continue to be setting trends all over the world and receiving the highest compliments in the world fashion industry.

If we take a deep and closer look way back to the Japanese history up until 1868, the year that the Meiji government came into being, there was long period in which there existed a policy of national isolation. During this time, Japan appreciated and cultivated its own cultural and traditional dress- The Kimono.

However, with the Meiji Period, Japan pursued a policy rapid Westernization, which extended to Japanese dress. Yet, this trend applied primarily to men and boys`

³ Despite its massive importation of Chinese culture in earlier era, Japan never lost its Japaneseness. What was imported was no always adopted and what was adopted was nearly always adapted or Japanized to suit Japanese life. Continental culture was considered important but not the absolute standard. During 19th century, when Western imperialism was on the march and came knocking Japan`s gates in the form of Commander Perry in 1853. Japan had only to look at China being caved up by the Western powers to realize that the only way to save itself from the same fate would be to end its 200 years policy of seclusion, open its doors to the West, and again import, evaluate and adapt. The process however, was often limited to the outward forms and manifestations of Western Civilization rather than its spirit which being based on a long tradition of Christianity was unsuitable for the Japanese to absorb. Refer to: *Pictorial Encyclopedia of Japanese Life and Events*, Tokyo: Gakken Co. Ltd. 1993, p. 82.

fashion. While Western-style clothing for women did find its way into Japan and saw the emergence of the modern girl styles, there was extensive criticism of the shift from traditional dress to Western styles among women.

Although Western fashion for men was associated with modernity and contemporary and encouraged, for women it was associated with an abandonment of traditional values of womanhood and often frowned upon. It was not until after the World War II, the new women's fashions finally began to develop in earnest and were less laden by, but never completely free of, moral critique.

After the war, the Westernization of Japanese dress developed at great pace and spread widely among all Japanese people. Fashion information flowed into Japan from the USA and France in a propagation of imported local fashion and style magazines.

As school teaching dressmaking and design emerged one after another, there was an explosion in the production of Western garments. Dressmaking, both professional and home-based, became an important part of life, and from this trend emerged the first of Japan's professional designers.

The shape of the industry was also changing as the traditional textile industry transformed itself and the apparel industry in response to the new market demands. The ease of this transformation reflected the excellence of design and manufacture of the traditional culture of the kimono industry and its ability to transfer that skill base to the new

fashion technologies.⁴

5.3 The Effects and Influences of Kimono Development to Japanese Civilization in Modern Days

The standard style of kimono is more precisely known as *kosode*, literally “small sleeves,” with sleeves ends sewn up except for the small opening at the wrist. This style came into use by women of the dominant samurai class during the Kamakura Era (1192-1333). Formerly the outer garment for lower classes and the undergarment for upper classes, the *kosode* replaced the *hirosode* (“wide sleeves” sleeves ends left entirely open) style worn by court nobles during the Heian Era (794-1185). The *kosode* style, which became commonly worn in Japan by the 16th century, has remained much the same for 8th centuries, *Katabira* are unlined *kosode* made of hemp or ramie that are crisp and cool for summer.

By the 19th century, the kimono became less graceful and more tabular in shape.⁵ Socially, the Meiji Restoration of 1868 brought great changes. Age-old court ceremonials were considerably modified or entirely replaced by European forms. Expectations included the ritual concerned with the enthronement of the Emperor, the Crown Prince’s marriage, *Shinto* services in the Imperial Palace sanctuary and so forth.

The Emperor and Empress now appear in court in European dress, as do court officials and ladies as well as the general public. On special occasions, the ladies wear a

⁴ Sandra Buckley (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Japanese Culture*, London: Routledge, 2002, p. 140.

⁵ Dorothy Perkins, *Encyclopedia of Japan: Japanese History and Culture, from Abacus to Zori*, New York: Facts on File, 1991, p. 176.

court dress called - *Keiko*. The ordinary Japanese wears western clothes extensively. At home, however, the native dress is often worn. Being loose and more comfortable, it is suitably adopted to Japanese domestic life⁶ such as- The Kimono.

5.4 The Effects and Influences of Kimono Development towards Globalization

Throughout history, people have been interested in seeing and hearing about the fashions of places near and far. Today fashion news is transmitted in numerous ways each of which communicates a different sense of fashion reality. But the most evocative fashion images are still these senses of fashion reality. The silent, static, high-resolution image of kimono fashion in a magazine or on a poster conveys the visual “facts” and mystique while leaving enough psychological space for the imagination to roam free. Accordingly, with the emergence of Japanese contemporary fashion, along came fresh new fashion expression in world fashion scenes globally.

As the word ‘globalization’⁷ has become one of if not the most often used term in today’s literature on the world of politic, economy and social. The writer will spend no time here on explaining it in any detail. From the writer’s point of view, the two clearest signs of the process of globalization have been the predictable gaining ground of transnational corporations worldwide, on the one hand, and the unquestionable rise of the United States to a hegemonic position by its military, technological, political and economic power, on the other.

⁶ *The New Official Guide: Japan*, Japan: Japan National Tourist Organization, 1975, p. 151.

⁷ Globalization is a process whereby social institutions become adopted on a global scale. On the other hand, business or company becomes international on starts operating at international level and the world rapidly becoming a borderless society.

As a consequence or perhaps as a combination of these two factors, the presence of American or Western cultures in its widest sense (i.e. business and management techniques, life styles, fast-food restaurants, sporting activities, films, pop music, culture and etc.) have also proliferated on a global scale.

It seems to be a truth universally acknowledged that the cultures of the world have in recent years become more similar, to the point that most of us now share a global, largely Western-dominated culture. People may not agree on whether this is a beneficial development or a regrettable one, but that that development has been taking place, and has produced deep changes throughout societies everywhere, seems to be generally assumed. Globalization have created challenged for the nature and even brought greater challenges and effects to the development of kimono in Japanese civilization.

5.41 Japanese Influence in Western Fashion

The Japanese designs or kimonos had no limits or restriction in terms of gender, size or time of day-it was often day or eveningwear, one-size and genderless. These designs had such novelty and achieved such popularity that, by the end of the 1980's. the Japanese fashion had its own unique currency high fashion throughout the West and Asia, and still remains a major influence on emerging young designers and wearers everywhere around the globe and civilization.

Over the 1970's, Japan had a strong impact on international fashion design. After the World War II, the Westernization of fashion progressed rapidly, the economy prospered and in step with the growing domestic economy Japanese fashion showed significant

development. Hanae Mori appeared on the world scene as a Japanese designer in the 1960's. She became known in the USA with her designer line of women's fashion in Japanese silk. In 1976, she became the first Japanese person to gain entry into Parisian *haute couture*. The year 1970 saw a shift worldwide from haute couture to prêt-à-porter.

When Tadaka Kenzō had debuted in Paris, his modest, everyday clothing designs were an immediate hit in world fashion stage with his designs that mixed Japanese form, pattern and color with the sensibilities of the Parisian urban scene. These clothes had their origin in images of Japanese peasants and farmers dress and people-oriented workers' clothes.

Miyake Issei was also just becoming known in Paris and New York in the early 1970's. His idea for clothing was a flat design that came from the concept of using only one piece of fabric or panels as in the production of kimono.

A guiding principle for Western clothing is that the garment is three dimensional, fitting over the contours of the body. While for Japanese clothing the idea is to hang the cloth flat on the body and let the left-over fabric drape down. The spaces that are opened up on the garment in this design method are something that is distinctly Japanese.

The 1970's was the time of Japan rapid economic growth and a dramatic rise in the standard living and levels of disposable income within a fast growing middle class. The fashion industry in Japan attracted increasing interest to the domestic designer brand market grew along with the economy.

From the end of 1980's came Miyake's Pleats series, which developed another innovative method where the pleats were added to the garment after all the cutting and sewing, in opposition to the conventional method. In this way, the contemporary Japanese textile and fashion industry has utilized the latest technologies creatively while still maintaining a firm grip on the foundation of the Japanese textile tradition: an absolute respect for fabric.

In the early 1980's, Rei Kawakubo and Yamamoto Yōji created a stir then they participated in the Paris collections. From Western conception of beauty based on symmetry, their designs, which consisted primarily of black with an asymmetry created from rips and torn, draped fabric, seemed to have no relation to the contours of the body.

Their style a Japanese aesthetic, which seemed to be such an expression of the contemporary moment: was so different from Western style that it drew much righteous indignation and was sensational in the fashion world as the "Japan Shock". The designs were baggy as though made to conceal rather than flatter the human body. The style was deliberately shapeless and made to look worn and torn often colorless, featuring black and white. Ultimately, these designs disrupted dominant *haute couture*.

They appeared shabby and above all, incomprehensible. However, one could say that this style represented the peculiar Japanese sense of beauty based on the notions of "Wabi" (the inherent beauty in disparity) and "Sabi" (the inherent beauty in solitude)- terms that may help create a cultural context for the quiet, symmetrical simplicity of their designs.

Japanese fashion captured the world's attention with these unexpected design

concepts that seemed so opposed to familiar Western design. Into the 1990's Japanese fashion continued to have a subtle but irrefutable influence on some of the most basic assumptions of style, texture and color in Western design houses.

The art of the kimono has undergone extensive re-invention in the 1980's and 1990's. Japanese brand designers like Yamamoto, Kawakubo and Miyake have often played with the design of the kimono in their global fashion lines, but just as importantly some Japan's renowned designers have also experimented in kimono design. A number of top designers now have a summer line of *yukata*, *obi* and *geta*.

In another interesting development, a number of overseas Japanese designers have made their reputations with eclectic sculpted designs that use kimono and obi fabric in unexpected textural juxtapositions with satin, tulle, wool, cotton and linen. While the fundamental art of the kimono remains remarkably consistent, even this traditional garment is not beyond the playful interventions of contemporary fashion trends.

Today, some of the leading European designers openly acknowledge their debt to Japanese design and openly gesture in their own designs to the trends pioneered by their Japanese colleagues. For the normal westerners to show appreciation towards the beauty and craftsmanship of kimono is usually expressed by hanging the kimono on their walls.⁸

⁸ Sandra Buckley (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Japanese Culture*, p. 140-1, 232-3, 255.

5.5 Conclusion

Of all the aspects of Japanese arts (kimono), it has had the greatest appeal for the Western world. In fact, this art form has enjoyed greater popularity in America than it ever has in Japan itself, and it is fair to say that only after Western artist, collectors, and scholars praised Japanese arts (kimono) to the skies did the Japanese themselves begin to appreciate the unique artistic heritage that was their.⁹

Japanese art (kimono) may be regarded as an exquisite flower on a branch of the great tree of oriental culture, whose roots have spread of throughout the whole Asian continent in many aspects and significances, Japanese art may be called unique since its is a reflection of how Japanese people live in everyday life, coupled with a sense of form and aesthetic sensitivity that developed in a country characterized by delicate seasonal changes.

Japanese history dates from 600 B.C. with accession of the ruler of the royal line, Jimmu Tenno. The Portuguese in the 16th century were the fist Europeans to visit Japan and in the same century Christianity was introduced. Eventually, contact with the Europeans was cut off by decrees of the rulers. Commander Perry, in 1854 succeeded in obtaining the first commercial treaty which was followed by the adopted of occidental civilization. But Buddhism and Shintoism are still the principal religions¹⁰ as well as the kimono.

A reviews of Japanese history reveals, that Japan was constantly influenced by new cultures from Asia, and these were readily adapted and assimilated by the Japanese people

⁹ Hugo Munsterburg, *The Japanese Print: A Historical Guide*, New York: Weatherhill, 1982, p. 3.

¹⁰ Ruth Turner Wilcox, *Folk and Festival Costume of the World*, New York: C. Scribner, 1965. p. 126.

through their keen sensibility to beauty, and develop into a peculiarly Japanese form. At the present time, Japan is again feeling the effects of influences of civilizations not only of Asia but of the entire world, and this has resulted in considerable creativity among its people. And we, on turn, are making every possible effort to present Japanese art including kimono heritage so that it may be enjoyed and appreciated by all the people of the world and nation.

World War II serve as a turning point since thereafter the distance separating East and West seemed lessened. And the orient in general and Japanese art in particular came to be studied with more enthusiasm everywhere including the artistry making of kimono. Efforts were made to learn and treasure the various styles of kimono by strict works. The result has been a deepening our knowledge of important works of art in civilization.

Japanese society has been changing rapidly in modern times as well as towards globalization, yet for most Japanese, cultural tradition retains their importance in daily life even no more sumptuary laws or imperial edicts have been passed on in modern era.¹¹

The elegant and artistic kimono remains Japan's national costume for men, women and children despite the fact that Western costume is being worn more and more because of its practicality. Even kimonos gradually disappeared from everyday Japanese wardrobes after World War II, giving way to Western-styles suits. Men, especially outside the home and when traveling, have adopted Western dress.

The kimono, as the national costume, express taste, characters and social status; the

¹¹ Bernard Rodofsky, *The Kimono Mind: An Informal Guide to Japan and the Japanese*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1965, p. 63.

colors, decorations and designs on a kimono accommodate changes in individuality and fashion. However, wearing kimonos makes Japanese people “more beautiful and unique” in every way.