

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

### 6.1 Summary of Findings

Japan is a unique country in many ways- its geography is both dramatic and expansive, and its population is large but welcoming. From the subtropical south to the temperate north, all the wonders of Japan are presented by four major islands (Honshu, Shikoku, Kyushu and Hokkaido) as bases,<sup>1</sup> it covers a spectrum of dazzling sights: golden sand beaches, washed by sparkling seas, grand fiords by mighty rainforest, white glaciers carved through rugged mountains, swathes of fertile farmland grazed by cows, and both cosmopolitan cities and quaint small towns.

Japan's seasons are clear-cut. Since the archipelago runs north and south some 3,000 kilometers, it encompasses both a semi-tropical and semi-frigid zone, providing the nation with weather almost everything sort: rainy, dry, snow, typhoons and most things in between such as varied climate has festered among the people awareness of nature, as can be seen in various arts and customs. Nature for example, is among an important theme in fashion, with seasonal elements incorporated as essential background.

The colorful and stylish kimono- the national garment of Japan expresses not only Japanese aesthetic sensibilities but the soul of Japan as well. The pride of kimono traces the unique civilization and history of Japan by showing the most significant part of Japanese culture that most unforgettable.

---

<sup>1</sup> Azhar Hj. Mad Aros, et.al., *Tamadun Islam dan Tamadun Asia (TITAS): Kertas 2*, Shah Alam: Penerbit Fajar Bakti, 2000, p. 260.

Japanese kimonos are known the world over for the beauty of their patterns, which are concepts of natural phenomena through the four seasons. Such patterns perfectly reflect the art of Japanese mind which delights in nature and feels close to it.<sup>2</sup> It has been a Japanese custom since the olden times to adapt their dress to the different seasons and weather.

In terms of social movements, forces from United States have influenced Japan as well as Western Europe (especially United Kingdom), adopting ideas and turning them into action with often more vigor than the countries from where the ideas originated. For example, just after World War II, this left Japan in devastated. Japan suffered with everyone else in the depression of the 1940's.

The trauma that this caused Japan was very real. But it also provided the impetus for Japan to forge ahead. Amidst the politic, economic and social pressures of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Japan developed one of the most advanced systems of social welfare for its people even they lived in the shabbiest environment during the World War II.

Japan is looking both to the future and back to its past as it forges a national identity unique to its Pacific shores. The country today is considerably more economically diverse that it was 60 years ago. The infrastructure is more balanced between primary, tertiary and secondary industries and there is an awareness of Japan being an Asia Pacific country with an Asian culture. Close economic ties have been established globally and politically, Japan is becoming much involved in world affairs on its own terms.

---

<sup>2</sup> *Pictorial Encyclopedia of Japanese Culture: The Soul and Heritage of Japan*, Tokyo: Gakken Co. Ltd, 1987, p. 110.

Japan also has a reputation for innovation and creativity, which is borne out of the country's geographic isolation. A fresh approach to life and living is reflected in the art, music, cuisine as well as fashion (kimono) of the country.

Time change, of course, but the kimono-western clothing relationship among the Japanese, born of close historical ties, still provides the most accessible mirror in which Japanese can view themselves through an outsider's eyes with their most proud costume- The Kimono.

While Japan's indigenous clothing traditions have evolved considerably since ancient times, the style, colors, patterns and forms of the kimono worn today became standardized over a century ago. By late in the Edo period (1600-1868) an independent sense of style-one marked by flamboyance and ostentation-had developed between Japan's emerging merchant class. In order to curb extravagance and promote more temperate modes of dress, the Tokugawa *shogunate* issued a series of regulations prohibiting commoners from wearing gilded or showily embroidered kimono and restricting the colors and materials they could use.

The townspeople responded by searching out richer color and more uninhibited designs for their dyed kimono, until these features too became the focus of sumptuary regulations. For most people, the only way to cope with this imposed austerity was by revising their notions of finery and finding new ways to dress with taste and style using plain patterns and simple fabrics.

One result of this process was the emergence of a remarkable variety of kimono

styles, each with its own symbolic and aesthetic pedigree- diversity can still be seen today. For those who wear kimono, the appropriate style reflects the occasion, the setting, the season, and the time of day. As in the past, however, the important factor is the identity of the wearer, the personality that leads the garment its essential character. Indeed, the kimono's most enduring virtue is said to be its capacity to reveal the wearer's inner nature.

A commonly used word for clothing in Japanese is kimono; however clothing in Japan is broadly categorized as either *wafuku* (Japanese style) or *yōkufu* (Western style). Kimono is the modern designation for the traditional Japanese robe-like garment that is worn belted at the waist, but this garment was historically called a *kosode* ("kimono" can also mean traditional dress in general). The history of Japanese clothing is in large part the history of the evolution of the *kosode*, a process that in turn was connected with the Japanese of imported styles and textiles.

Most Japanese clothing style derived from Chinese and Korean fashions. The loose shirt and baggy trousers in vogue in 5<sup>th</sup> century China were imported, and then slowly adapted to the Japanese climate and lifestyle. Two major styles of clothing emerged, one retaining the simple shirt and trousers and the evolving more and more layers of long, flowing garments. The lower classes favored the first for its ease of movement; the aristocracy perfected the second, refining the elegant lines and color combinations to suit the varying tastes of successive periods.

Since Meiji Restoration, Japanese had dressed as though they were in Europe, wearing stiff collars, hats and long dresses, with no concessions made to the climate. Nowadays, on the major streets of modern Japan's cities, men and women sport a

fashionable of style. The international recognition accorded Japan's top fashion designers, coupled with a relative affluent economy at home, has sparked an interest in fashion among Japanese consumers.

In fact, Japan has become one of the world's major retail markets for designer wear-both domestic and imported. The Japanese appetite for designer merchandise is legendary and elegant, and *Gucci* handbags, *Louis Vuitton* luggage and *Hermes* scarves are popular commodities. So too are the fashions of Western couturiers, from *Giorgio Armani* and *Ralph Lauren* to *Donna Karen New York*.

Western-style apparel was first introduced to Japan during the Meiji period (1868-1912), when the country ended its long isolation and began to open up to American and European cultural influences. While many men quickly adopted Western clothing, it was not until after World War II that large numbers of Japanese women abandoned kimono in favor of the more practical styles worn by Westerners. Nowadays, most women put on kimono only on special occasions, and men do so even less frequently.

The luxurious fabrics and sophisticated motifs used for kimono continue to inspire some of Japan's leading couturiers, while others are striking out in new directions. Drawing upon a rich textile heritage, designers like Mori Hanae, Takada Kenzō, Miyake Issei, Yamamoto Kansai, Kawakubo Rei, and Yamamoto Yōji are able to infuse and fill their fashions with a distinctly Japanese flavor.

But fashionable clothing is by no means the rule in Japan. For millions of people-schoolchildren, office workers, department store employees, taxi drivers, and businessmen-

daily attire is a uniform of one sort of another. Together with their stylishly clad compatriots, these people in regulation attire contribute to the lively pastiche that characterizes contemporary Japanese dress.

From the writer's point of view: Fashion has nothing to do with attractiveness, beauty, modesty, or utility. It is a great natural force that enhance from the arts. If you are one of those attracted to Japan's kimono you will find that some things, thankfully, have not changed- until today, the beauty of kimono is still kept as well as their traditional cultural values and the Japanese identity. The kimono is still remaining as one of the most beautiful Japanese's treasure. Firstly, there is the inherent beauty of the traditional kimono. And secondly, there is the charm of the kimono wearers. Innocence may be on the way out, but it is not lost, and is still more easily found in Japan than most other places in the world and civilization.