

## CONCEALING AND REVEALING. A SOCIOLOGICAL HISTORY OF 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY JAPANESE DRESS\*

SHEILA CLIFFE\*\*

This paper sets forth the proposal that kimono is not only tradition, but is, and historically has been, a fashion item which has been evolving throughout history. This paper traces sartorial change, mainly through the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, to demonstrate how fashionable sensibilities have been expressed in Japanese dress.

I propose that the academic disciplines of fashion theory or cultural studies, where fashion is studied, and the disciplines of ethnology and anthropology, where 'primitive' or 'other' cultures have been studied, have, by dividing clothing into two separate disciplines, created orientalisng discourses which have trapped the clothing of other cultures into simplified categories and representations of gendered tradition. It also leads to the idea that other cultures' clothing is a constant and unchanging element, with no fashion history. These simplifications fail to reveal the intricacies or the varieties of the clothing, and how it is appropriated in order to express the fashionable tastes of the people who make and wear it. The author believes that looking at the history of kimono, since Western clothing arrived in Japan, will reveal a complex scene where clothing is consciously employed in the process of nation building, and is a site of both nationalistic or patriotic expressions, and of personal stylish statements reflecting contemporary Japanese identities. I contend that the kimono was, and still is a fashionable item, and that contrary to the ideas of Dalby and Goldstein-Gidoni, looking at the history of Japanese clothing over the last hundred years, will place it on the fashion map of the world, as a fashionable garment which is appropriated by women to express their sartorial tastes and sensibilities. Dalby says:

Kimono was becoming more and more representative of tradition. From Taisho on, youfuku continued to change, according to fashion, while kimono froze into the set

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\* 20世紀における日本の衣服の社会学的歴史

\*\* Sheila Cliffe 十文字学園女子大学短期大学部 英語英文専攻 (English Language and Literature)

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tableaux we see today. (Dalby, 1993).

And to quote Goldstein-Gidoni:

...the kimono that is wrapped around the female body has become a national symbol of traditionality. (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2005 In Robertson).

Indeed, the kimono has often found its way on to lists of clothing which does not change, or changes only very slowly. Lipovetsky says that:

“The Japanese Kimono remained unchanged for centuries”. (Lipovetsky, 1994 p19).

Barthes says:

The longest, (timescale of change) covers the archetypal forms of clothing in a given civilization. For centuries and within a specific geographical area, oriental men wore, and still wear in part, a dress; in Japan it is the kimono..... (Barthes, 2005 p94).

Entwistle writes:

In contrast to ‘modish’ dress, ‘fixed’ dress is another term for traditional dress, such as the kimono, or sari, which is characterized by its continuity with the past rather than the logic of ‘change for change’s sake’. (Entwistle, 2004 p45).

It was the anthropologist Levi Strauss who proposed the idea of hot and cold cultures, the cultures of the West which thrive on change, he considered hot, and those which did not evidence such radical change were considered cold and unchanging. They were considered to have traditions but not history. This kind of thinking has contributed to the situation where we have both great and contemporary thinkers dismissing other systems of clothing, without apparently having examined them. It is still generally considered that only in the West, in Europe, did the conditions exist for a fashion system to emerge, (though when it emerged is disputed), and that other systems of clothing do not have a fashion system.

Though Entwistle admits that the kimono does change, she says that it is too slow a change to be considered fashionable change. Nowhere does she make any attempt to provide an explanation of what speed of change constitutes fashionable change. Whilst kimono history writers have revealed how change does occur, Kondo Tomie even writes about seasonal

changes in the early 1920s and Liza Dalby has written about fashionable kimono, many writers on kimono, (Dalby, Minnich, Liddel, Munsterberg,) have dismissed kimono in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as either a representation of gendered tradition only, or having nothing left to say.

Christopher Breward argues in "Fashioning London", that sartorial behavior was an essential element of building the modern, urban environment and locates fashion as being an urban phenomenon. If this is the case, it is necessary to look at the example of the city of Edo, (now Tokyo) during the Edo period, 1603 to 1868, and concede that it might have had the conditions for the emergence of a fashion system. During this period the city of Edo grew to a metropolis with a far bigger population than the cities of either Paris or London, which were the largest urban centers in Europe.

Yoshida Mitsukuni writes about rebuilding Edo after the great fire in 1657:

Edo became a vast metropolis with a population in the 1700s of about 1,200,000. In contemporary Europe the largest city was London, with a population of 800,000, and the second largest Paris, with 500,000. Most of the Edo population was concentrated in the area set aside for the *chonin*, the ordinary townspeople. It is estimated that there were 67,000 people per square kilometer, far more than the average population density of Tokyo today, so that Edo was filled with dense, slum-like areas surrounded by endless urban sprawl. By comparison, the population of Kyoto at this time was 250,000 and that of Osaka, 400,000. (Yoshida, 1986 p20)

If there are various conditions required for a fashion system to emerge, then perhaps Edo was a possible site, and the theory that a fashion system belongs only in the West, may not be tenable. Writing on the development and legacy of the Edo period, Tessa Morris-Suzuki writes:

While the vertical flow of ideas—from class to class—was encouraged by the urbanization of the samurai, the horizontal flow—from region to region—was encouraged by the division of the country into competing economic units. The political map of Tokugawa Japan was extraordinarily complex.....

and also states:

In a sense, therefore, Japan—with its multiple centres of political power—was more similar to medieval and early modern Europe than to the centralized Chinese empire; and this is significant, for it is precisely political decentralization which has been singled out

by some scholars as a key element in the European scientific and technological revolution. (Morris-Suzuki 1994 p27).

Though Morris-Suzuki does not discuss fashion or even clothing per-se, she highlights the way in which technology changed the textiles and textile related industries from the Edo period to the present day.

### **MEIJI FASHION. (1868-1911)**

#### **INDUSTRY, FOREIGN INFLUENCES, REPRESENTATION AND STANDARDIZING KIMONO.**

Though images of the Edo period show a great flowering of culture, including textile culture, particularly in the middle years of the Genroku period, the latter part of the Edo period was marked by austerity. The Tokugawa regime was a repressive regime in many ways, and every aspect of peoples' lives was closely governed. The wearing of extravagant dress was forbidden by successive shoguns, and finally in Tempo, (1830-44) the production or selling of silk was completely forbidden. Theaters were banished outside town and the actors' gorgeous costumes were burned. New garments were generally made from cotton, which had come to be mass-produced in Japan during the early Edo period. Hairdressing, gift giving, and even the buying of household utensils were strictly controlled or forbidden. The Dutch had managed to keep a foothold in Japan during Edo with the VOC, (Dutch East India Company), which had traded textiles as they were both precious and portable and could be exchanged easily for spices or other goods. Outside the world of the courtesan and the actor, the clothing of the common people was extremely dull, with black, grey, brown and blue plain or striped kimono dominating the scene. At the end of the period, Perry and others were knocking at the door and were to force changes unlike anything Japan had ever seen before. They arrived wearing trousers.

The arrival of the foreigners marks the beginning of the Meiji period and the effect on industry was immediate. As a light industry, the textile industry was one of the first to be modernized. Textiles were a key industry to Britain in the industrial revolution, and they were similarly significant for Japan. In 1869 a group of weavers were sent to France to research weaving methods and they brought back the Jacquard loom. By the end of the century most mills in Japan were mechanized and were involved in the production of draperies and upholstery as well as dress fabric. Chemical dyes added a huge range of colors to the palette and also provided more stability of color than natural plant dyes. Wool, previously an exotic fabric brought in by the Dutch, was now in much demand for the making of uniforms and worsted was produced in large quantities. Tailors could hardly keep up with the demand for uniforms for the forces and government officials.

The sartorial developments of the Meiji period are extremely interesting as they demonstrate Japan negotiating a position in the international world. The austerity of the late Edo period left its legacy on the Meiji period. The Emperor declared *kosode* effeminate, and of Chinese origin. China was gendered by the Japanese here as female, in contrast to the masculine and powerful west. Japan constructed itself as male, literally by putting on trousers. Sartorial moves here were a visual key to the role that Japan intended to construct for the future. The army, police, postmen, the government and civil servants went into uniform or western suits. The Chinese characters for suit, (*seibiro*), come from the name of the street, Savile Row in London, which is famous for its tailors. The gender bias is obvious here. Nation building was the business of men, not women, and so women were not affected by the changes until a little later. Men during this period led a double life as regards clothing, with trousers during the daytime, and kimono for relaxing at home. This seems to support the theory of impression management on a large scale, as the Japanese home was the home of personal kimono. It appears rather contradictory that the process of building the Japanese nation should not take place in Japanese dress, but when one considers the company that Japan wanted to join, and the importance of being seen as a serious contender, the importance of visually gendering the nation as male, was of great importance. Thus kimono effectively disappeared from men's public life in the workplace.

As there were few tailors in Japan, western clothing was very expensive, and at the beginning of the period a few western accessories would suffice to give the impression of being a modern girl. Men could cut their top-knots and sport a beard or moustache, and maybe wear a bowler hat. Women could add a parasol, a pair of gloves or a pair of lace-up boots to her kimonoed figure. An interesting change was that the Empress Haruko started a trend wearing a red hakama, similar to the one worn in the Kamakura period. This had released noble women from the sea of fabric under which they had languished in the Heian period court. This revival of an old tradition became a symbol of the modern, educated girl, and was institutionalized as school uniform. Since the year 2000 it has again become popular, to the extent that the university graduation ceremony sees almost 100% of students graduating in kimono and hakama today. The Empress stopped blackening her teeth and shaving her eyebrows - required fashion for a Japanese married woman. It is hard to imagine what shock this must have caused to those who had been faithfully shaving and blackening their teeth, but the impression of a mouth full of black teeth on Westerners is only of rotten teeth, so the response to this must have been enough impetus to change this traditional custom.

The most fashionable venue of the time was the Rokumeikan, an Italianate venue, where

state receptions and balls were held for foreign visitors. In 1886 the Empress Haruko appeared there in Western dress and declared that it was the natural descendent of traditional Japanese clothing, which had been two-piece, and not one. (*Kosode* and *hakama*). She urged women to wear western dress but not to neglect Japanese quality and workmanship. To follow her rather thin logic one could make a case for Western clothing being more patriotic than kimono. Women rushed to discard their kimono for corsets and bustles and indiscriminately took on the trappings of Western dress. The samurai wives must have been in extreme discomfort dressed in corsets and bustles dancing with foreign dignitaries. The entertainers of Yoshiwara had fashionable reputations to keep up, and they also wore Western dress in order to look modern and progressive. They, unlike the samurai wives, would have been very much at home flirting with the foreigners at the Rokumeikan. At this point in time western clothing represented progress and enlightenment.

Of course there was a backlash to this indiscriminate borrowing of foreign culture. At the end of the nineteenth century Japan was celebrating a victory in the Sino-Japanese war, and was in the process of preparing the new constitution. The Satsuma rebellion, a nationalistic movement calling for a return to traditional samurai values, had been put down, but those who died were made into popular nationalist heroes. They died in their kimono, protecting Japanese values and traditions, and were seen as noble in their cause. Women had returned to their kimono and only those connected with politics or those very wealthy were in Western dress. Kimono was seen as an expression of national pride. Discourses of the time were about the shape that the nation would take in the future, about the body politic and the citizens of Japan. Wearing kimono at this time was an expression of Japaneseness, and rather of tradition than of fashionability. At this time women embodied the Japanese spirit, whilst men wore the more progressive suit. The role of guardian of tradition was thus given to the woman. As Japan struggled to create an identity at this time, many cultural forms became standardized. This included the family structure and clothing. War always means that nationalistic discourses abound, and designs such as chrysanthemums, flags and cherry blossoms were seen on haori backs, and even maps or images of Manchuria were acceptable designs for garments.

Due to the draconian sumptuary laws of the Edo period, the Japanese have long been used to being subtle or even subversive in their expressions of fashionability. Whilst the *kosode* had worked its way out from being underwear, to prototype kimono, to kimono itself, the design on kimono had shifted from all over to shoulder and hem, then to hem alone and finally to the inside of the hem. This subtle or hidden beauty is known as *iki*, and it is a very stylish expression in Japanese fashion. Sumptuary laws have proved in many cultures to be extraordinarily difficult to police and Japanese have been extraordinarily creative in their

ways of getting around these laws. If one could only make a kimono of cotton, they made it of cotton, but lined it with silk. If *shibori*, fine tie-dyeing, was forbidden, they put it on the lining instead of the kimono, or they dyed it with a stencil instead of tying it. These laws have to some extent led to the technological development of the textile industry. Formal kimono of the wealthy in the Meiji period was often worn in three layers, called *otsui*. Though the inner layers were not seen, they were dyed inside and out with the same beautiful patterns as the outer layer. These kimono were worn trailing around the floor. This must have made going out rather difficult, but fashion has never taken a straight course from the impractical to practical, as our flirtations with platform shoes and mini skirts will testify. Even allowing for the artistic license of the Edo period artists, Liza Dalby has observed that the kimono of Edo was certainly a much looser and more flowing garment than its counterpart in Meiji, with its wide obi and high and tight collars. We can certainly draw parallels between the kimono of Meiji, with its tight collars, wide and constricting obi and the big bow on the back, and the high necklines, corsets and bustles of the Victorian period.

Dalby notes that kimono types are named by synecdoches. In other words they are defined by garments other than themselves, in the same way that the word underwear indicates the presence of something that is outer wear. A *furisode* (waving or long-sleeved garment) implies the existence of a shorter sleeved garment. A *kosode* (small sleeved garment, technically small sleeve-opening or cuffed garment) implies that some others have big sleeves. Until the Meiji period there was no generic term for kimono as there was no need for such a term. There was no other. But in Meiji, the introduction of an other, in the form of Western dress, brought in the need for a generic term for Japanese clothing. *Kosode* was clearly inappropriate as a *kosode* had a far larger sleeve than did Western dress. It also could not serve to describe *furisode* or other Japanese garments. The word kimono, "thing to wear", was coined and it served to define Japanese dress as opposed to Western dress. From this time the kimono slowly became accepted as the standard representation of Japanese dress, though the kimono of the ruling and daimyo classes from which today's kimono is a descendent, actually comprised only 3 to 7% of the population of Japan. The kimono as we know it, has therefore never really been the clothing of the people in the way that the sari has been the clothing of Indian women, for example. A large number of people were involved in farming or fishing and would have been wearing the two-piece geometric indigo dyed garments typical of the countryside, but with many regional variations. In a strange turn of events the kimono became the standard representation of Japanese female dress whilst losing the battle to be Japanese female everyday dress.

## TAISHO FASHION (1912-1926)

### INDUSTRY, FOREIGN INFLUENCES, HIGH AND STREET FASHION, ACCESSORIES

Many women today admire the kimono of the Taisho period. Though it was a short period, it was imbued with the spirit of modernism. Though the faddish acceptance of everything western was over, the nationalism of the period was not a return to the repressive Tokugawa era, for Japan was a new democracy. Newly fledged supermarkets and department stores opened their doors to female consumers and women previously stuck at home or working on the land could see the range of new kimono styles available. Throughout the period the representation of class through kimono, strong until the Meiji period, was slowly eroded away. Magazines newspapers and the radio disseminated information and women were leaving the home for the work place, too. In 1924 there were 17,000 looms in Nishijin in Kyoto, and the textile industry was the most important industry in Japan. In the Taisho period women had rejected their bustles and corsets and returned to their comfortable kimono, but they were not remaining in traditional roles and were seeking suffrage and equal rights. Seitou magazine wrote:

In the beginning, woman was the sun. An authentic person. Today, she is the moon. Living through others. Reflecting the brilliance of others. And now, *Bluestocking*, a journal created for the first time with the brains and hands of today's Japanese women, raises its voice. (Translation by Sharon Sievers, 1983 p163, Quoted in Annie Van Assche, *Fashioning Kimono*, 2005.)

Obviously for women the role of good wife and wise mother was not the one to which they aspired.

The industrial development of the time is important in that it made kimono available to a much wider number of women. *Meisen*, previously woven at home, from the rough carded silk that was of poor quality, was now made largely in factories and a way to direct dye the weft threads before weaving the kimono had been discovered, meaning that kimono with far more colors and intricate designs could be woven than could be made on a hand loom. These were the only kind of kimono to really be mass-produced and they were standard wear for school-girls and housewives through the 1920s. Though they are made of poor quality silk and are considered the jeans and T shirts of the kimono world, they are enjoying popular acclaim now, and have been the subject of large textile exhibitions, such as the one at the Victorian and Albert Museum in London, in 2005. Wool was now being imported on a large scale, to be used for underwear, nightwear, girls wear and collars and accessories and was being dyed with stencils and colored paste, a technique called *utsushi nori*.



There were two definable strands of fashionable kimono at this period in time. One was the *Yamanote* or uptown style, propagated by the samurai wives, and the other was the *Shitamachi*, or the downtown style of the merchant families. The samurai had become a class of bureaucrats, or politicians, or had gone into business or education. Their wives were stylish but restrained, reflecting the fact that the status and importance of this class had been lost when a sword-bearing military class was now an anachronistic and irrelevant class. It was considered to be a *shibui* or dull or understated style, and it was predominantly seen in dark colored plain or striped kimono. They also favored a white kimono collar, which may have come from seeing the white shirts worn in offices by working men and women. The white collar seemed to represent formality.

The garments of the townsfolk were more colorful and bright. They were thought to be *iki*, or chic and their style was typified by a yellow *kihachijo* kimono. These bright yellow garments are woven on Hachijo island. They sewed a black collar over the collar of the kimono and their inner collars were not white as in the *Yamanote* style but brightly colored and heavily embroidered. Eventually, as people wish to be upwardly mobile, the *Yamanote* style became dominant, and there was a loss of much color and variety because of this. *Shitamachi* style was dormant but did not die out, however, and is being drawn on as a source for kimono wearing today.

A fascinating aspect of the Meiji and Taisho periods is the effect of globalization. The West was discovering Japan in great exhibitions, as Japan was discovering the West. Japanese women stayed in their kimono throughout the 20s, but the designs are clearly influenced by art nouveau, a Western art movement inspired by the plant and bird designs of the Japanese, originally popularized in the Rimpa movement. Though everyday wear was plain or striped, the formal wear of the period shows how fashions changed and developed during the period. It is the bright and bold designs of this period, which are much sought after today. After an exhibition of Egypt in Tokyo, mosaic designs were popular. Stained glass, chintz, (*sarasa*), designs from the Shosoin storehouse, and Genji designs all had their season. Flowers native to Europe and not Japan were particularly popular, and at the end of Taisho, the rose, native to northern Europe, was a particularly popular flower, which was representative of the art nouveau influence on kimono. Cobalt blue and old rose were popular colors at the end of Taisho. After the devastating kanto earthquake of 1923, Ginza was rebuilt in steel and concrete and became a new and fashionable area, an urban space for Japanese women consumers who were moving out of their houses.

Kondo Tomie has explored the Taisho kimono in great detail and draws attention to the

accessories that were very important, as one could display sophisticated taste through these small items at this time. The obi of the Taisho period were not the obi of today, so it is possible that the obi may continue to metamorphose. The *maru* obi, a thick double width brocade obi was used for formal occasions, a satin weave obi, *chuya*, or day and night obi, one side in black *donsu* and the other in *yuzen* or crepe silk, and a *kujira* obi, black on one side and white on the other, like a whale, were used for everyday wear. Eventually all obi made with different fabrics came to be known as *kujira* obi. Patchwork has been a popular way of extending the life of pieces of fabric, and also a decorative device in Japan for a long time. The *han-eri*, detachable collar on the kimono underwear, which is visible at the neck, was a key site for fashionable change at this time. They were decorated in embroidery, *shibori* or *yuzen* painting. Commonly, they depicted small scenes of nature, but could also be art nouveau or abstract, or of traditional Japanese patterns, and could be of many different fabrics or colors. They were collected by *shitamachi* girls, and a new collar could cost as much as a new kimono. They carefully sewed them on and removed and cleaned them, being careful not to get them yellowed with age or grease on the skin. Designs changed seasonally, and the new designs were announced in the fall, and released into the shops at new-year. Women would rush to buy them and the embroiderers were kept busy by this trade. The collar has always been a signifying area of the kimono, position indicating age and rank, and the collar of a maiko, swept of her neck in an erotic manner is an important symbol of her profession. When she is mature and becomes a full geisha the ceremony is called 'Turning the Collar'.

Another fashionable item of the time was the *obidome*. As a kimono accessory it was probably born from the brooches seen on Western dress in the Meiji period, but it started out as a clasp to hold on a samurai's sword with a cord. When sword carrying was banned in the Meiji period, the metal workers had to think of a new occupation and they turned their hand to making these ornaments to go on the obi. Here we see a government policy, ostensibly unrelated to clothing, which had the outcome of making a new fashion object. A brooch or necklace would disturb the lines of the kimono, but the *obidome*, resting as it does in the center of the obi, is not a distraction from the kimono lines at all. *Obidome* can be made of coral, turtle shell or ivory, metals or wood or cloisonné. They conform to kimono aesthetics as do the collar designs and often show seasonal motifs or depict the natural world, and are coordinated with the kimono or obi, or the collars. They added another location for the playful signs and references that are found in kimono.

**SHOWA FASHION (1926-1989)****MOGA AND ART DECO, MODERNISM, PATRIOTISM MASKED AND ON DISPLAY, KIMONO IN WARTIME, POST WAR DEVELOPMENTS.**

The modern girl, *moga*, was a descendent of the modern woman. The word was coined in the late twenties, to refer to the urban, modern girl who was seen about town in cafes, or department stores. She was thought to be promiscuous and a consumer. She read magazines, including Blue Stocking, and she wore her hair in a bob or permanent wave. The bob was low maintenance had none of the signifying baggage of traditional Japanese hair-styles. Kimono of the thirties were influenced by art deco, and art deco is a style perfectly suited to the geometric form of the kimono with its emphasis on surface and line. The floral motifs of art nouveau gave way to the more geometric and abstract forms of art deco. Stripes, zig-zags, triangles and polka dots in contrasting colors animate the surfaces of the garments. A survey in Ginza in 1929 found only one percent of women in Western clothes however, which clearly shows that women found in kimono a vehicle for the expression of their fashionable and consumerist tastes (Sato, *The New Japanese Woman* p49, from Annie Van Assche, 2005). Art deco was both fashionable and stylish and, on a kimono, was an expression of being Japanese.

Modernism was a related feature of the thirties, but was more progressive than the essentially decorative nature of art deco. Modernism attempted an exploration of the new Japan, and left behind traditional references for those of the urban landscape, modern architecture, buildings and bridges. Anna Jackson in her essay *Dynamic Lines and Synchronised Rhythms*, (in Van Assche, 2005 p36), notes that speed was an important element in modernism. The car, the train, the bus and the plane, and these all found their way in perfectly realistic detail onto the surfaces of kimono. There was almost no object which could not appear on a kimono, making it a very powerful conveyor of messages about life and thought. The parallel in the West might be the political message on a T-shirt, but the sophistication of the messages in kimono is on a quite different level from this kind of slogan.

The war period for Japan was extremely long. It started in 1931 with the Manchuria incident, when part of a Japanese built railway in China was blown up, causing war there and forcing withdrawal from the League of Nations. Japan was learning from Western nations, which had previously, through unequal treaties and the setting up of colonies, secured monopolies and trading rights, which ensured the success of their industries. Japan was on the warpath, hoping to set up a unified Asia under Japanese rule and also hoping to defend itself against the perceived threat of communism. The Axis Alliance with Germany and Italy led it into major world war, so the discourses between 1931 and 1945 were all about nationalism, pride in the homeland and patriotism.

It was in the thirties that women really started wearing Western dress on a daily basis. Women had become familiar with home sewing and knitting, and Western dress required less fabric than kimono and so it was marketed as being practical clothing rather than Western. Dalby noted that:

Without stretching the truth, *yofuku* by this time could claim urban Japan as part of its home territory. Kimono had lost the functionality competition and was on the verge of losing fashion as well. (Dalby, 1993 p128).

Whilst the first part of Dalby's statement is true, *yofuku* was making great inroads and making urban Japan its territory, interestingly enough, it was not in *yofuku* but in kimono that fashionable change of the time, and the prevailing discourses of the time, can be seen. *Yofuku* was necessary for the workplace, indeed, men had been wearing it for several decades already, but at this time in Japanese history, nationalism was the fashionable word of the day. Japan's incredible rate of modernization and progress was being pushed forward by the war effort. Planes were needed, technology was needed, industry needed to produce ships and vehicles, weapons and ammunition at a tremendous rate. Nationalism and progress went hand in hand. It was impossible to separate modernism and the war effort. Propaganda permeated every aspect of people's lives. There were government organizations set up to mobilize the spirit of the people and there were many fund raising or spirit raising events. As the war period was so long for Japan, (fifteen years), it was vital to have a propaganda machine to keep people on the home front interested. They also had to keep them persuaded in the justice of the cause, as such a long war period meant great deprivation for the majority of Japan's people. Nationalism was fashionable, and what better place to wear your heart than on your native clothing. It was kimono and not *yofuku* that became intimately bound up with the ideology of the time. It was here that sentiments were expressed. It was not "tradition or fashion", it was "tradition in fashion". Yes, *yofuku* was practical but it was not, and never has been a blank canvas in the way that a kimono has, and it was never as close to the people as a kimono was. The kimono of the thirties are a special group of kimono which reveal the heart of a nation in a unique way.

Kimono neither disappeared in the war years, nor became old fashioned. The war-time garments are extremely interesting, in Japanese called *omoshirogara*, or interesting designs. They come under the heading of propaganda textiles, but propaganda textiles are interesting in that this form of propaganda comes not from the government, but from the market place. In other words, if people do not want to buy them, they would not be made. The fact that people wanted them, commissioned the fine silk formal ones, and bought the cheaper, mass

produced ones, indicates that there was a market for these textiles and so one can get an idea from this of how popular they must have been. Propaganda textiles are of two types. The first type is to commemorate an event, usually a victory in battle. There are many of this type depicting scenes in Manchuria, Japan's puppet state in China. The other type of propaganda textile is a consciousness raising one. It is to mobilize the home front, to keep their minds on the battle and to reinforce the validity of the noble cause. These do not just reflect the spirit of the times, but are designed as political texts to actually produce the spirit necessary to win the war. One can see all the hopes of the Japanese people embedded in the images on the cloth and the text and subtext there. Not surprisingly there were mainly worn by men, but that is not exclusively so, and there were garments produced for women and children too. When the paraphernalia of war is on a woman's garment, it tends to be more abstracted into a design, and further from reality, but the designs on men's garments are very real, down to the type of ship or plane depicted.

Nationalistic images such as flags and Mount Fuji were depicted, maps of war zones, flags of the allies, and all kinds of paraphernalia associated with war. The signification of the cherry blossom was rewritten at this time. When seen with Yasukuni shrine, or an image of Mount Fuji, it came to be associated with soldiers fallen on the battlefield.

Such a long war period meant that Japanese were deprived of many essential goods and starvation was just around the corner for many people. The government rations hardly sufficed and there was a huge black market where people would trade anything they had for a little food. Fabric was rationed in 1942, and the slogan 'extravagance is the enemy' made sure that people would make do and mend, rather than go out and purchase new goods. Permanent waves, beer and neon lights were banned, as unpatriotic, and extravagant, but kimono was also seen as unpatriotic because of the large yardage used to make the big sleeves. People could cut the sleeves, but often they refashioned their kimono into the practical two piece *monpe* (pants) and wrap-over jacket of the countryside in Japan. *Monpe* pants could be worn over a kimono, but if the sleeves were long, someone might slash them for being unpatriotic, so women cut the sleeves into tubular ones. Kimono were tucked away in drawers, but were slowly traded in for bowls of rice or vegetables to feed the family. Women lost not only their wardrobes, but their inheritance, and many women have written of the sadness of parting with their kimono, which in most cases were never replaced.

In the post-war period, kimono has not completely disappear from the landscape, though it will never again be everyday wear for the majority of people. It remained standard in some parts of the service industry, Japanese restaurants and inns, and in the world of Japanese arts and crafts. Post-occupation Japan became relatively rich, and the 1960s saw a revival of

kimono for formal occasions, and New Year. It also saw the rise of the middle-class housewife, who, with her washing machine, vacuum cleaner and refrigerator had time on her hands and could study tea ceremony, ikebana or English conversation. She would also encourage her daughter in these gentle arts, as to be cultured would help her find a suitable, well-educated and highly paid husband.

The most important change between the pre and post war years, was the way in which kimono knowledge was transferred from one generation to the next. Historically, as all women could wear it, mother, grandmothers, aunts could easily teach their younger relations to wear it, but a generation grew up who had not worn kimono and so the chain stopped. To fill this need, kimono schools stepped in. Originally they were perhaps in shops, but they became part of culture schools, or culture centers. They taught *kitsuke*, dressing, *wagami*, Japanese hair styling, *saho*, kimono manner, *wasou*, kimono sewing, and *kumihimo*, the art of braiding. What had been general knowledge was now specialist knowledge held in the hands of a few experts. The kimono schools are closely related to the tea schools, which dictate what should happen. Kimono schools are a double-edged sword in the world of kimono. They have enabled the art to survive in many ways, as for most women, they are the only place to learn the art of dressing. On the other hand systematization has led to standardization, and by creating one right way, they have created many wrong ways to wear kimono, thus limiting its diversity and expressive power.

Japan continued to be affluent through the 80s and women could buy expensive kimono for new-year and special rites of passage or ceremonies. Whilst the kimono system remained relatively closed, it was not completely unaware of other fashions, and I believe that the 80s were typified by pastel colors in both kimono and obi, and flowery designs. This was probably at a similar period to when Laura Ashley was fashionable in the UK. Generally the kimono speaks of uniformity more than diversity.

#### **CONTEMPORARY FASHION. ASIAN CHIC, JAPAN CHIC, GLOBALIZATION AND POST MODERNISM**

Since the economic bubble burst at the end of the 80s, most Japanese have had to tighten their belts. It was around this time also, that trading barriers began to come down, and Japan was forced to open up its markets to cheap imported clothing from other country's sweatshops. The 1990s saw a boom in Asian style, not just in clothing but in fashion and interior goods too. After this, interest in Japan's own crafts and handmade goods began to grow. Another factor was that the taboos on wearing "used clothing" had begun to be forgotten. Young people in Harajuku were wearing used American clothing without a second

thought. These factors paved the way for a new kind of kimono store: chains of recycled kimono. Sometimes the kimono are unused, but recycled, and sometimes they are second hand. They cost a fraction of what it would cost to have a new kimono made, and they have the advantage of being sold sewn up already. Japanese began to shun the lifetime loyalty to one shop and look around at different options. A very large kimono outlet in Kyoto went bust, but opened up, (still with its five buildings) on-line. Here people can hunt for bargains, buy through auction, or have an order-made kimono, without leaving their homes. A whole range of new publications about kimono have sprung up too. Many of them feature recycled kimono, and others promote a natural lifestyle including kimono. These kimono tend to be upper range weaving and plant dyed hand-made. Women have flocked to see the annual exhibitions of Ikeda Shizuko's collection of Taisho and Showa collections at Isetan. They are not only going to see the textiles, but also to gain inspiration for their own kimono wearing practices. Many women find inspiration in the bold and bright designs of the Taisho and early Showa periods, and colored collars, tabi and accessories are back in fashion in a big way.

In the 30s it was buildings and airplanes, in the 2000s it is tiger skin prints and lace on the collars. In the 30s girls coordinated their collars and *obi dome*, now they coordinate their fake nails and their cell-phones. There are many new designs available, especially for the yukata or cotton summer kimono. This was originally nightwear, but has become the popular wear for summer dates. Increasingly boys and well as girls are wearing it. In this way, they are finding their way back into *wafuku* from western dress. Playing cards, sheet music, piano keys and for children popular cartoon characters can appear as well as the more traditional gold fish or flowers. There are kimono for Christmas, Halloween etc. Kimono is refusing to be relegated to the role of tradition.

Outsourcing has greatly reduced the costs in making of kimono and yukata. Yukata are sewn cheaply in China, and embroidered obi are also made in China. Shibori tie-dyeing is outsourced to Korea along with mud-Oshima kimono. Though the original articles are of superior quality, the price-tags are far too expensive and difficult for most people to invest in. Twenty years ago one chose a role of cloth, and was measured, and picked up the yukata two weeks later. Now one can take home a yukata bought off the peg, the same day, and can choose from a far wider range of designs and fabrics, too.

Young men favor manly designs of tigers and dragons, but also designs from the Taisho period, such as bats or spiders webs fit in well their images and are popular. They are often seen in the summer in yukata, with Japanese pouch bags for their phones, and sporting black toe-nail varnish. To be a cool couple in the Tokyo summer heat, is to be seen together in stylish yukata.

## CONCLUSIONS

Young people are not choosing to be traditional, and neither are many women who wear kimono. Young people seem to be appropriating a tradition, and rewriting it according to their own fashionable sense. Oriental discourses have hidden from sight the extraordinary variety in kimono, and its ability to metamorphose, chameleon like, and to cater for the fashionable needs of the women who wear it, both historically and in today's Japan. To wear a kimono makes a statement and in spite of being part of a deeply signifying system it continues to reflect and play an active role in discourses in Japanese society. The way in which it continues to interact with global forces and high technology indicate that it can still be a vehicle for fashionable expression and a modern statement. It is increasingly available through many sources, can be expensive or cheap, and remains a stylish addition to a Japanese wardrobe.

Iwao Sumiko argues that it has been the very marginalization of women in the processes of modernization since the Meiji period, which has given Japanese women the freedoms of role and relative economic freedom that they enjoy today. To wear kimono is a freedom that women are increasingly choosing to enjoy. (Iwao Sumiko, 1993).

Woodard says of womens' wardrobes:

Women are able to see aspects of themselves in the external forms of clothing. Ranging from their former selves to fantasy selves to work personas, the diverse aspects of the self are 'distributed' through the array of items in the wardrobe. (Woodward 2007 p12).

To have kimono in one's wardrobe is to be able to see one's Japanese self in it.

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