

Writing #2: Traditional Japanese Garments: The Kimono

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DHM 3213: Heritage of Dress II

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April 4, 2022

Japanese culture has influenced western civilization for centuries, and continues to do so even today. Their clothing designs as well as new ideas often amaze their American counterparts and add breakthrough designs to the fashions of the day. In addition, their traditional garments have provided endless inspiration for movies, costuming, and even the daily wear of many American decades. The most popular Japanese historical garment that still has relevance today is the kimono. This garment can portray a wide array of ideals about cultural and social significance of its era as well as the age and gender of the wearer. Its silhouette and style have been adopted time after time in many western designs and ideas and still has reaches even to today. The kimono has great cultural significance to Japan and has had a great impact on the United States which does not seem to be vanishing anytime soon. The kimono is constantly being reinvented in changing the pattern or material as well as being the inspiration for many new designs itself.

Japan has a deep history, and the kimono garment adds to this history as well as portrays the country in a beautiful way. The kimono came about from needing more formal women's styles for social events during the Meiji Period of 1868-1912 (Reck, 2020, p.4). However, the exportation of other traditional Japanese garments began as far back as the 1600s because of Dutch traders needing textiles from India and the far east (Callahan, 2020, Part 2). The kimono garment we mainly see today is a very ornamented version of the dress that came about from the Meiji Period (Reck, 2020, p.5). The original kimono would not have had as much beading, simply ornamented patterns in the silk using dye or stitching. The kimono is typically made from a singular piece of silk with one-size fits all measurements (Reck, 2020, p.5). These standard measurements would have been 14 inches wide and 12.5 yards long (Reck, 2020, p.5). Tailored sizing would not have been important because kimonos were meant to be oversized and fit

simply by the tie around the waist. Additionally, there are two categories of the kimono, the *haregi* being the formal, ceremonial type, and the *Fundagi* being the more casual type (Reck, 2020, p.6). The *haregi* kimono can be differentiated for men and women as well as marital status by sleeve length, decoration, colors, materials, etc. (Reck, 2020, p.6). The sleeve length of the kimono signals the marital status as well as age and gender. For example, the adult male has the shortest sleeve with the adult female being only slightly longer (Reck, 2020, p.7). However, the unmarried female semi-formal was quite a bit longer than the adult female with the unmarried female formal sleeve almost touching the bottom of the garment itself (Reck, 2020, p.7). In addition to the sleeve lengths, the colors and patterns of the kimono also add to the information regarding age and social status (Callahan, 2020, Part 1). For example, bright, contrasting colors would be used on younger women's kimonos along with very grand and detailed patterns, whereas the more subtle colors and prints with much less patterning would be used for older women and for men (Callahan, 2020, Part 1). A specific kimono called the *furisode* is worn by young girls for attending the coming-of-age ceremony; this specific "kimono has long flowing sleeves that extend to the hem of the kimono" (Reck, 2020, p.6). In terms of social status, an outer kimono, which hangs like an open coat, would be used in winter months for much wealthier families as a way to show status (Callahan, 2020, Part 1). This status symbol was important to show that the wearer had enough money for many nice kimonos as well as outer layers that could be made from thicker material and worn on a more regular basis. All of these terms and symbols go to show the complexity of the kimono. It is not simply as a beautiful garment but also as a symbol of many of the ideals and societal expectations of the day for which it was created.

The impact of the kimono on the fashion of the United States made itself apparent almost immediately with the fashions of the 1920s following the same straight line of the kimono. In addition, a new ‘contemporary kimono’ was designed to promote Art Nouveau in Japan (Thoelen 2020, p.744). This included creating newer, more sinuous patterns on the silks and making more contemporary adjustments (Thoelen 2020, p.744). In addition, with the styles of today, the Blazer has come back into fashion from the 1980s, and the oversized blazer dress has a very similar straight-line silhouette as well as very oversized sleeves. This shows that the kimono may still be influencing us today, without our knowledge and yet still under our noses. With the many ways that the kimono has grown and evolved, Americans may wear them in the east as a sign of respect, and in the United States, eastern culture is more revered and respected. The only times that cultural appropriation comes into play on a large scale is Halloween when many children dress up as their heroes or as who they want to be when they grow up, and can cross a line into appropriation of other cultures as a whole. However, overall, cultural appreciation seems a more fitting way to explain the American view on the kimono and traditional Japanese garments. American culture is such a melting pot of so many countries and ethnicities that there is not simply traditional American garments, so seeing the culture and history of other countries is much more respected because of the lack of original American culture. In terms of changing the kimono, Americans have definitely added a different color palate to the garment, making it much darker than it was originally intended to be. The original garment was much brighter than what is seen today in darker hues with colorful designs only. The original kimono would have had the base silk as the bright color, not simply using color as a garnish in the designs on the surface.

The kimono is ever-evolving, and has always been a great symbol of eastern dress and traditionalism. However, the United States tends to constantly focus on clothing and designs that

accentuate the waist and the hourglass shape, overall. In contrast, with the roaring twenties came a time of ignoring the tight waisted looks and carrier pigeon gowns of the 19th century and opting for looser-fitting garments. The 1920s in the United States saw shorter, straight-line dresses with new dance styles as well as new styles of living to the fullest. This new silhouette helped women to be able to move more freely as well as add more beading and ornamentation than with the older dresses from the last century. The kimono has the same silhouette of the American 20s and yet still endures in terms of style and history that is tradition and yet ever-evolving as well. In regard to the past designs of the 20s, there may be a more straight-line silhouette in the future of garments from the United States as a way of resurgence for the kimono and the roaring 20s.

Another time the straight-line silhouette made a comeback was in the 60s with the paper dress styles and more A-line silhouettes as well. However, this time, as the dresses were less tight-fitting, the skirts went even higher. These short, more cylindrical dress styles have made their way back to main-stream American fashion many times, and can always do it again. That is why, as looser jeans and pants are coming into popularity again, there is no need to assume that dresses will not attempt the same style change and meet again with the 1920s and 60s. The future of the kimono and its straight silhouette may even be seen today in more straight-line coats of the 2020s as the 80s are making a comeback with wider shoulder and silhouette styles and over-sized clothing that are all the rage currently. Especially with war between Russia and Ukraine and the United States sending troops over, war garments may also start to present themselves as they did during other war times in America. This resurgence of war-time garments lends itself to possibly seeing more straight-line silhouettes in coats such as the Mackintosh and trench coats as well as straight-legged pants worn by military men and often adopted by women as well. these straight silhouettes are seen over and over again and can be seen most originally in the kimono

and its traditional origins from Japan. Evolving technologies in the fashion industry might show even greater, more detailed patterns for the kimono, not only the adoption of the silhouette but also the designs and prints for dresses. This technology could create more precise stitching as well as more perfect dyes of the silk. New technology could also help in creating exact measurements of the kimono for the buyer, making the garment more personal. Website and AI technology could also help in selling more because people can try-n the kimono online and see exactly what the garment will look like on them without having to go to a store or physically try anything on.

The kimono is not simply a traditional garment from Japan; it is a worldwide symbol for the tradition and ingenuity of eastern and oriental design. It lends itself to sharing Japanese culture and history with a western world that sees all eastern countries as simply 'the east'. It has a past as well as a future and has evolved as much as the country itself. It portrays the beautiful oriental styles that were not only functional, but that also displayed the heritage as well as told the story of the wearer. The kimono showed status and age and gender and told others almost everything about a person that they needed to know for social status. While Japanese ideals and styles have come a very long way since the beginning of their country, they are still ever-evolving and have so much to offer the world. Japan has shown itself as a beautiful 20th century country that can evolve and grow in more ways than one. Japanese designs have come and go and will continue to amaze and astonish the fashion industry, but the kimono will always be the most esteemed garment of Japan. The Japanese have managed to maintain the kimono as a very recognizable traditional garment that not only portrays their country respectfully and nobly but preserves their history as well. This garment is not simply printed and decorated silk, but the very history of a country and its past and future ideals.

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