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An Investigation into the Historical Context of a Kimono and Its Sartorial Relevance in Western Societies in 2022

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T-shape kimono,
Japanese fashion.

Abstract

Worn by both males and females the kimono is the national dress of Japan. Previous research highlights that this national dress is fading from tradition and evolves to develop with the times and fashion trends. This research aims to investigate what a kimono represents both historically and currently within Western society. The idea of the kimono being more than a national dress representing Japan, the main three themes researched will be (1) Shape (2) Narrative (3) Journey from East to West. Based on both primary and secondary sources this research indicates that there is a strong relationship between the universal increase of kimono wearers in Eastern and Western societies from history through to present day. Primary research is utilised in the form of two types of interviews. Primary outcomes bring a personal perspective to how and why kimono is worn nowadays within Europe. Secondary sources include online lectures held by kimono specialists as well as subject relevant books. From the 19th century where the Dutch were the only European country to trade with Japan, an exchange of fabrics took place which later led to the exchange of: fit, fashion and pattern (primarily within Western womenswear fashion.) This distinct garment never gets discontinued and evolves with social demands within society today.

I. Introduction

In Japan, the kimono is a symbol of longevity and good fortune which is why it might still be a popular garment worn today. (Nitanai, 2017). Therefore this research focuses on three aspects of the kimono to understand how the history of Japan has been communicated through the garment's journey and adaptations: (1) Shape of kimono (2) Narrative (3) Journey from East to West. Shape of kimono will be discussed to understand how it became such a significant feature historically and the relevance socially. Nature is an important influence to the Japanese culture, which is often displayed visually through materials of the kimono or layered to communicate the season through colour and print socially. Through narrative and shape the kimono attracts admiration from abroad, as kimono is iconic to the Japanese identity worldwide. From the fabric narrative to the shape of the kimono both elements separately were merged with European fashion. This two way traffic of style evolved and grew the diversity of the iconic kimono known today.

The purpose of the primary research is to develop knowledge on Japan's national dress by questioning a variety of kimono wearers and a fashion brand to understand why they own or sell this garment and to provide further knowledge behind this historical fashion movement still alive today. The research aim is first to understand the historical context of a kimono regarding shape and the narrative which will then be analysed to assess if there is a relationship with the social context of a kimono for Western wearers. The objective is to conduct two primary research methods and to analyse if there is a relationship between how the kimono is worn within Japan historically in Western societies. The two primary research methods will explore the journey the garment has made both historically and physically from East to West. The research was categorised into 3 subjects to examine and to provide further knowledge behind this historical fashion movement still alive today. The history and social aspects of a kimono focusing on the iconic shape of kimono, social narrative

communicated throughout the kimono and physical and social experience explained by the wearers. The research will develop new knowledge and understanding on how a garment from the Edo period (1603–1868) has evolved and expanded its reach based upon the three aspects researched. Secondary research gathered demonstrated information and examples from the Edo period as Jackson (2021) mentions it was a time of luxury production as she is a specialist in Japanese cultural relations between Europe and Asia. Limitations of the research include the questionnaire demonstrating a small scale variety of Western participants. To further the research additional participants from a wider variety of geographical locations could be included as well as brands mentioned by participants interviewed to understand their thought process behind selling kimono.

II. Literature Review

Officially, kimono was recorded in trading documents in the Edo period (Kawlra, 2002) a time where Japan was under the rule of Tokugawa Shogunate (the military government of Japan at that time). A time of eternal peace, political stability and economic growth under military dictatorship. Carriger (2018) mentions "The word 'kimono' means literally 'a thing to wear' ...which evolved from the word 'kosode' meaning '...small sleeves referring to the opening at the wrist.' As mentioned in dressed podcast interviewing curator Anna Jackson (2020).

1. Shape of a Kimono

To begin, the T-shape kimono with squared sleeves is a minimalistic approach on pattern cutting created through the use of simple cutting and wrapping of a piece of textiles around the body. "The kimono is made with no waist different to Western clothing and an economical use of fabric." (Shudo, 2021) Which creates no gender specific silhouette. Nevertheless, traditionally the size, depth and finish on the sleeves communicates the age, marital status of the wearer as shown in Figure 1

demonstrating it is gender specific if you understand the subtle shape details on the sleeves. Dalby (2001, p. 187) mentions “Men’s kimono sleeves are square-cut, adult women’s are slightly rounded.” Men’s kimono sleeves are shorter and sewn closed on the side which touches the body, however women’s sleeves are open from under-arm to bottom edge. As Shudo (2021) explains “Long sleeve kimonos are for unmarried women’ which is visually identifiable within Japanese society.”

2. Narrative of kimono

The T-shape of the kimono is created using sharp angles, the sleeve corner in particular communicates the social status of the wearer within society. Dalby (2001, p. 187) states “Children, girls and women are perceived to be more like one another than any of them are like men,” and traditionally the sharper the corner of the sleeve the more socially accountable the wearer.

Hierarchy is also communicated through the subtle finishing’s of the kimono sleeve.

Status and nature are important narratives within the Japanese culture influencing kimono fashion. In one of the older Japanese calendars 72 seasons were documented subsequently only a few days long and kimonos were changed every few days to reflect this. Cliffe (2017) published it was considered ‘boring and uncultured’ to be behind nature and the seasons: ‘Noble women became literal representations of flowers in the house.’ Women were dressed to represent flowers through colour combinations and layers of the kimono. Romantic names were given to these colour combinations ‘such as “under the snow” which included a layer of green for leaves, several layers of pinks and white on the top to represent the snow.’ (Cliffe, 2017). As English (2011, p. 5) describes “kimono became part of the visual language of the garment.” For the Japanese “one of the principle meanings of nature... is simply ‘beauty’” (Beauty, 1997,

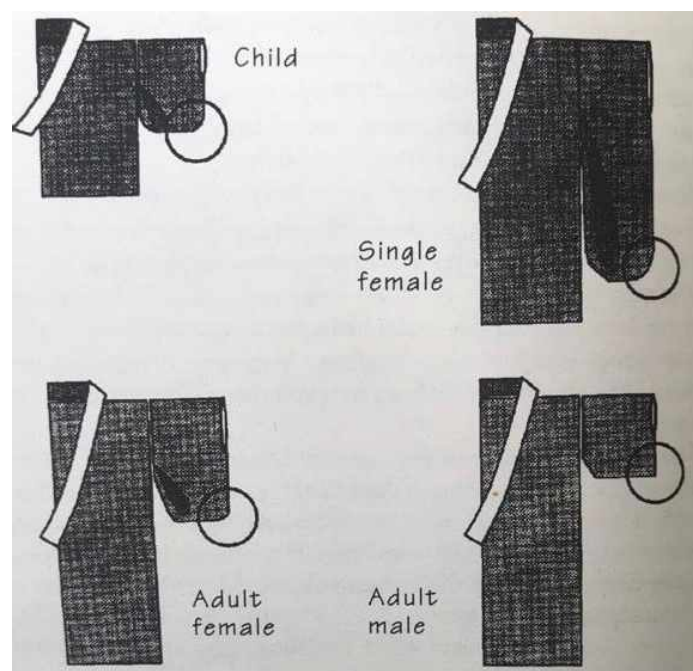


Figure 1. Construction of a kimono sleeve according to age and gender. (Dalby, 2001, p. 188)

p. 71) which is why the two are often combined together as a piece of artwork.

3. Journey of Kimono

In the Edo period fabric was traded between the Dutch and the Japanese mainly because the Dutch bought the kimono fabrics back to Europe in 1678 (Jackson, 2021). Figure 2 below shows a day dress made by the Misses Turner in 1876 using kimono fabric to re-cut and re-tailor into a traditional Western day dress.

In the late 19th century an appreciation for cultural exchange through fashion took place as Jackson (2021) states ‘men of new order wore men’s Western dress.’ Zachary and Calahan (2021) interview Anna Jackson discussing how these lustrous beautiful satin silks and specifically kimonos for foreigners were embroidered. The exchange was reciprocal as shown in Figure 3 below.

The left photo shows a fabric made in Lyon manufactured for a gentleman’s suit. However, ‘Being at the end of the silk road, Japan was the ultimate Eastern destination.’ (Cliffe, 2017, p. 14) Furthermore, fabrics played a role as diplomatic gifts from the Dutch (Jackson, 2021). The right image shows a Unchikake silk which a wife of a high ranking male would have received as a gift and made into a Unchikake (jacket to wear over a kimono) within the Edo period. Both are examples of how the traditional representation of a kimono have been transferred into the social context of societies in Europe and Japan.

In summary, the kimono is much more than a garment at first look. It symbolises a hidden language that is only understood by those who have the inside knowledge. From status, class and gender of the wearer, the kimono poetically acts as a canvas for the wearer displaying a subtle visual narrative. The montage of new



Figure 2. Screen shot from the ‘Kyoto to Catwalk’ V&A talk via Eventbrite with Jackson (taken by author)



Figure 3. Screen shot from the 'Kyoto to Catwalk' V&A talk via Eventbrite with Jackson (taken by author)

unique garments through the exchange of fabrics with heritage creates a new look and trend for the Eastern and Western wearers.

III. Methodology

Qualitative research, the narrative research designs approach, was utilised to investigate the social context of the kimono in-depth and compare to the historical context of a kimono discussed. According to (Cresswell, 2020, p.45) "Qualitative procedures in which research described the lives of individuals, collect and tell stories about these individuals lives and write narratives about their experiences."

Hence, two types of interviews were conducted: one with a fashion brand 'Undressed' and another with multiple kimono wearers. The interview with a fashion brand 'Undressed' whom were selected due to being a brand known for creating upcycled and repurposed kimonos made from sari fabrics was conducted online and transcribed to understand how and why a modern

day Western kimono inspired brand has developed. The questions were created for the individual brand owner to allow her to tell her story behind what kimono means, her re-branding, inspiration, the fit of the kimonos, how to wear 'Undressed' kimonos, customer reactions, who the customers are and if there is a link to Japanese kimono. Convenience sampling was utilised for the kimono brand as it was selected and the owner was willing to participate. The results may be limited due to interviewing only one brand and the brand being relatively new to the industry.

Additionally, the second type of interviews took place via an online form provided via social media however within August 2021 only 5 participants responded therefore to gain further responses the form was posted via social media to a kimono specific group for an additional month, September 2021 and gained a further 3 participants to gain unbiased results. Snowball sampling was used to indirect recruit participants (Marcus, Weigelt, Hergert, Gurt, & Gelléri, 2017) who own a kimono to reveal how it is part of their

wardrobe and to examine what their kimono means to them. In total the open ended questionnaire provided data from 8 participants (7 female and 1 male between 33 and 72 years old) to examine and compare the social context of a kimono in Western society today. The sample range was limited to 8 participants in order to develop in depth wearer feedback for analysis as participants were asked to provide answers and a photo. The participants knew they were being analysed on their kimono and clothing therefore may not portray themselves in true norm within the limited sample range. The objective of the questionnaire was to find out why participants own a kimono, how they wear it and what it symbolises to them. Questions were specific and limited to 7, encouraging participants to give an in depth response whilst focusing on their thoughts and opinions. The primary data collected for this research focuses on 3

research themes of a kimono: (1) Shape (2) Narrative (3) Journey from East to West in a diary format as participants answer questions based on their memories, opinions and experiences of their kimono. This has helped to understand how the kimono is viewed within society today. Responses were recorded in Table 1 and 2. To validate by expanding the research quantitative research could be developed going forward gaining feedback from a larger sample audience who wear kimonos is essential.

Ethical considerations were taken into account as a consent form was sent alongside all questionnaires and interviews to the participants to complete. This ensured anonymity for the participants and how the information will be utilised. To underpin qualitative data research outcomes secondary literature has been used.

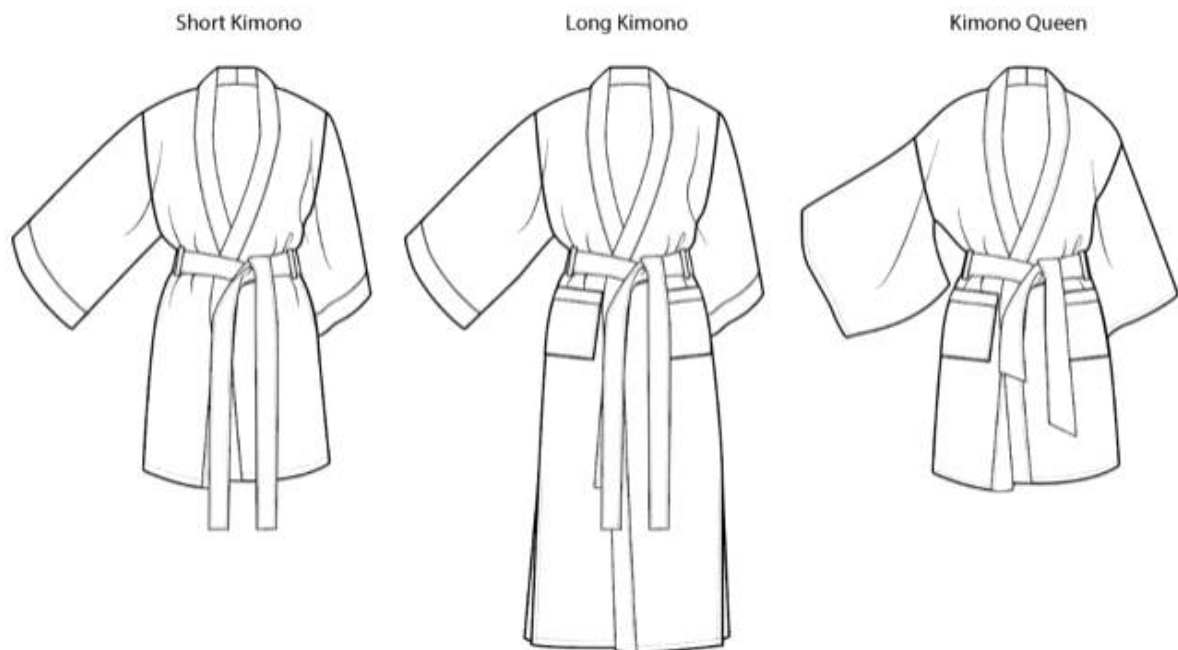


Figure 4. *Sketch of the 3 kimono styles by 'Undressed'*
(drawn by author)

IV. Results and Discussion

1. Shape of a kimono

Collected data revealed the sleeves are a key characteristic. Within the questionnaire as shown in Table 2, participants were asked ‘What does the word “kimono” mean to you?’ and participant 4 responded ‘*The word kimono I know as an item of Japanese clothing and when I think of the kimono, I do see that traditional silk, belted, wide sleeved garment,*’ confirming the iconic shape of the kimono as discussed in the literature. Participant 4 elaborates further on the kimono having a ‘*T-shaped structure or a dropped, relaxed shoulder and definitely a wide sleeve, almost as though the sleeve has the same circumference throughout*’ referring back to the fabric usage and shape of the overall garment. This is comparable to ‘Undressed’s statement ‘*(...) it makes me think of layering clothes and it makes me think of big sleeves (...)*’ when asked to describe what a kimono meant to them. The big sleeves are featured throughout her kimono collection ‘as shown in Figure 4.

The kimono style ‘*Kimono Queen*’ (right illustration in Figure 4) has been described on the website as ‘*taken inspiration from a Japanese traditional kimono style*’ with specific reference to the dropped rectangular sleeves the brand owner mentioned in the interview. The long rectangular sleeves make it difficult to do jobs due to the fit of the garment, however this is suitable for a garment of leisure where the wearer is not restricted in movements. This, however would have a huge impact upon when and how people are able to wear it in their busy day to day lives within society nowadays. Despite the kimono’s impractical large rectangular sleeves they still remain a constant however through time have been tweaked and amended depending on societal needs for example, the sleeves were modified to stay out of the way, either by their sewn shape or by a looped cord called a *tasuki* which kept a “normal” size kimono sleeve from swinging.’ (Dalby, 2001, p.169) These practical amendments allowed women to work in the traditional

dress as ‘two piece style clothing was for labour, kimono was for leisure.’ (Dalby, 2001, p.165) Subsequently, images collected of the participants’ kimonos in Table 1 below demonstrate the drape of the kimono either on a body or hung loose and free. Participant 5 closes two of their kimonos with a Western belt, (kimono 1 and 5) not a traditional obi belt. ‘A obi is the sash over the kimono. The obi belt stabilizes the shape.’ (Shudo, 2021) This study highlights the adaptations through the cultural exchange of fashion where the kimono inspired garment is adapted into a Western version using a belt, not obi or leaving it to hang open on the body.

Interpretations across both the questionnaire and interview reveal the kimono is an adaptable garment for the participants. Participants were asked in Table 2 ‘How do you style the kimono?’ and ‘*versatility*’ was the most common word used when describing how a kimono can be worn in multiple ways for different social situations which is also visually shown in Table 1. Participants 1, 3, 4, 5 all mention multiple ways to style their kimono in contrast to participant 6 and 7 who wear kimono traditionally. Participant 1–3 demonstrate how they use the kimono as a layering piece. However participant 5 and 8 also demonstrate how kimono can be worn as loungewear as well as layering. In addition, there is a distinct difference between the use of formal wear of the kimono and casual looks achieved through layering and altering the fit of the original garment. This is comparable to ‘Undressed’ who mentioned ‘*I do like that about the product that it is so versatile for so many different people.*’ Participant 6 and 7 both revealed in a questionnaire how they have been trained to wear kimono in Japan which may impact upon why they wear kimono in a traditional method.

In contrast to the sleeves it could be the fabrications and textile of the kimono effecting the practicality of the kimono for the wearer. Denim kimonos, shown in Figure 5, are particularly popular with men. The link to Western jeans and the casual elements makes this style of kimono practical for everyday wear. In addition ‘Undressed’ described their product as light and breathable, these practical elements make wearing a

Table 1. Images of Participants kimono's which mainly show a loose drape fit (taken by author)

	Participant 1 / Age 49 / German / Circular Fashion Designer (Lived in UK for 4 years)	Participant 2 / Age 33 / British / Corali Dance Company Associate Artist	Participant 3 / Age 35 / British / Internation al Territories Manager at PPL	Participant 4 / Age 33 / British / Service & Education Trainer	Participant 5 / Age 33 / British / Fashion Design Lecturer	Participant 6 / Age 46 / Ukrainian / Fashion Design Lecturer (Lived in UK for 12 years)	Participant 7 / Age 72 / British / Archaeology & Egyptology Lecturer	Participant 8 / Age 43 / S. Korean / Pattern Cutting Lecturer (Lived in UK for 4 years)
Image of Particip ants kimono' s								

*Given to
wearer in
Japan by
hotel

kimono today socially and physically comfortable within society in line with the needs of the wearer. '(...) western clothing is more convenient than the kimonos with its long sleeves and wide obi.' (Dalby, 2001, p. 164) Participant 2-4 in Table 2 describe how they feel 'cool' when wearing the kimono with referencing to

feeling stylish and comfortable. Participant 2, 4 and 5 own multiple kimonos and describe their feeling of wearing kimono as positive through words such as: chic, elegant, divine, relaxed, free, bohemian which might explain why they own multiple versions.

Table 2. Participants responses to questions asked about the three themes: shape, narrative and journey from East to West

Shape of a kimono:	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5	Participant 6	Participant 7	Participant 8
What does the word "Kimono" mean to you?	No idea what the word means.	The wave as a print and how fabric can move, blossom. Love the bold neckline cross over and how to alter the look.	Aware of traditional Japanese item.	Traditional Japanese clothing.	To cover up in a fun, playful way with flowing fabrics, the ultimate loungewear.	Historical, traditional dress of Japan. Pride of Japanese culture.	'Thing to wear [from the shoulders]', Japanese garment that has existed under various names for 1500 years+.	Traditional clothing in Japan.
Describe any connecting words you link to "Kimono."	Elegance, grace, craft, colourful, minimalism.		Layering, breathability, structure and unisex.	Traditional silk, belted, versatile, layering, adds personality, sparks conversation		It produces jokes and it is a language.	'Kitsuke', that is 'dressing.'	East Asian costume?
Narrative of kimono:	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5	Participant 6	Participant 7	Participant 8
What was your reason for purchasing?	On a styling job and colleague gifted vintage kimono.	N/A / gifted from friend / loved the coin buttons and unique piece / given to sleep in sleep pod hotel in Tokyo, Japan.	To wear for wedding day.	Warm tones and drape / love the colours Versace feel / gifted / gifted due to peacock print.	Short length, plain print / summer loungewear kimono / love the print and reclaimed sari / love traditional print / for a festival.	A study subject and object of research. Have a collection of fabric for kimono, purchased to create fashion.	I collect kimono. This kimono filled in a gap in the collection: it is a summer weave.	I didn't have a particular intention, bought in sale to match pj's.
How long have you owned the kimono?	7 years.	14 years / 3 years / 9 years / 9 years.	3 years.	4 years+ / 5 years / 3 years / 2 years.	8 years / 10 years / 6 months / 7 years / 6 years.	20 years.	8 years.	2 years.
How does it make you feel when you wear it?	If insecure can distract from personality or be bold.	Warm, love the weighted element and family connection / sophisticated, elegant / cool / elegant.	Loved, connected, romantic, cool.	Cool, edgy, unique / divine - compliment from celebrity / close to someone who gifted, adventure / I wear this when on holiday, reminds me of dressing up as a Peacock for Rio carnival.	Layering piece, 2000's American chic / joy, relaxed / free / chic, wear this in garden, relaxing with book / happy, bohemian, throw it in a suitcase and travels around the world with me.	Happy and proud to be a small part of the ancient culture.	Very comfortable, stylish, easy to fit.	I wear it after a shower, so I feel fresh and clean feeling.

Table 2. *Continued*

Journey from East to West:	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5	Participant 6	Participant 7	Participant 8
Where did you purchase the kimono from?	Gifted.	Hand knitted by family, influenced by kimono shape and style / charity shop in Manchester / Vintage shop in Melbourne /	Online vintage seller.	Vintage store Pimlico London / J. Anderson / One hindered stars / Lisa Angel.	NYC Sample sale / UK High Street / Upcycled brand / Charity shop / UK High Street.	In Japan.	From Ichiroya, second hand kimono sellers, now closed.	www.laredoute.co.uk
How do you style it?	Casual style with same coloured under garments and sneakers or high heels. Tighter t-shirt or turtleneck underneath.	Cosy / layered with beret, jeans and high socks / with broaches and a beret / sleepwear.	Dark colours for winter, light colours for summer and a bandana.	Many ways / over black work outfit / over swimwear or with skirt / over black layers.	Casual with shorts or layered smart / loungewear when getting ready / lounge wear or over a jumpsuit / oversized loungewear / over swimwear.	I don't 'style' a kimono. I only follow the rules of the traditional wearing.	With summer, weave sky blue, obi and low, key styling. Worn with geta.	No style to wear as it is night robe.

In present day the kimono has limited wear within Japan. In order to encourage citizens to wear the kimono the mayor of Kyoto, Daisaku Kadokawa has offered incentives such as 'people wearing kimonos can use public transport and enter some local attractions for free.' (Okazaki, 2015) Drawing from Table 2, results indicate the versatility and the usage of the kimono. 'Undressed' mentioned when asked about their business in the interview that the kimonos are designed mainly for women to make them feel really good.

Research has found a higher response and research into female kimonos than males which could be for multiple reasons. Participant 1, 2 and 4 are all female participants whom were gifted their kimonos and others purchased for themselves as shown in Table 2. Figure 6, right shows a men's blue kimono, 'it is rare to have a

men's kimono survive as they are not handed down like women's and have sombre colours.' (Jackson, 2021)

The kimono has evolved and adapted through history. Figure 7 demonstrates kimonos modified by Western society. The European market night gowns have tubular sleeves and are padded with silk (worn in the Netherlands) as a link to loungewear.

These kimono style robes / night gowns use Spitalfields silk, are used as informal robes around the house. Similarly participant 5 pictured in Figure 8 demonstrates the kimono worn as house wear as described in Table 2, '*It's so oversized that I swan around the house like a 1950's movie star. I wear this over a playsuit or cami PJs.*' Participant 8 additionally wears their kimono for loungewear showing both Western and Eastern wearers are not wearing kimono in



Figure 5. A model wearing a denim kimono by Denim Dosu (Okazaki, 2015, p. 89)



Outer kimono for a young woman (uchikake), 1800-1850 (Khalili Collection)

Figure 6. Left: Screen shot from the 'Kyoto to Catwalk' V&A talk via Eventbrite with Jackson showing outer kimono for a younger woman, called a Uchikake. Worn by a courtesan
Right: Screen shot from the 'Kyoto to Catwalk' V&A talk via Eventbrite with Jackson showing blue men's kimono (taken by author)



Japanese rocken (night gowns) made for the European market, 1700-1750 (Kunstmuseum Den Haag and National Trust for Scotland, Newhailes House)



Figure 8. Right image shows Participant 5 wearing Charity Shop Kimono to relax in

(taken by author)

Figure 7. Screen shot from the 'Kyoto to Catwalk' V&A talk via Eventbrite with Jackson, left images shows Japone rocken (night gowns) made for the European market in 1700-1750. (Kunstmuseum Den Haag and National Trust for Scotland, Newhailes House)

the traditional historical method. As justified by brand 'Undressed' the word kimono means 'a really loungey, floaty garment... a piece of garment that you would wear to relax in.' Then again, Undressed does mention when asked about the re branding as previously called 'the Kimono brand' and the new branding refers to 'Undressed'

'And I thought that I'm just going to call it the "kimono company" because that is literally what it is. In Australia, they call dressing gowns, kimonos. I think they don't see it as maybe a Japanese word. I think they literally just see a kimono as a dressing gown.'

At the V&A exhibition 'Kimono: Kyoto to Catwalk' Hendon (2020), Part 2 explains how the links between the Japanese kimono style garment and Westerns loose

informal dressing gown garment. This versatile use of the Japanese national dress as a casual garment in other cultures has moved worldwide. Linking back to the versatility of the kimono through the wrapping technique kimono represents many symbols. The way which a kimono is wrapped represents life and death. When on the body, left over right symbolises life. Whilst wrapped right over left symbolises death. '(...) to encase the human torso in cloth, the Japanese choice since historical times has been front-wrapping, left over right, jacketlike construction.' (Dalby, 2001, p. 166) Interestingly through the data not all western methods of wearing a kimono involve wrapping of the kimono around the body. To summarise, the main characteristics which define the shape of the kimono are: the sleeves, fabrication and t-shape. However specific Western interpretations also include versatility and loungewear attitudes.

2. Narrative of kimono

The data revealed the rationale behind owning the kimono which focuses on the owners narrative. When analysing the data, participants were asked: 'Where did you purchase the kimono from?' Table 2 shows 41% of the kimonos were not brand new but from a charity shop, vintage or bought second hand / in Japan. Therefore this may explain some participants own multiple kimonos due to being gifted or associate with positive experiences therefore purchase more. This relates to Dalby (2001, p. 4) who mentioned consumers numbers shows purchasing vintage kimonos in Tokyo has increased due to them being inexpensive and seen as a 'fashion trend.' Second hand kimonos are not desirable amongst the Japanese and seen as cast off's therefore antique kimonos are cheap for foreigners to buy hence participant 6 and 7 purchasing there's directly from Japan / Japanese online retailer. In contrast, historically kimonos within Japanese society were significant family heirlooms for women where they are passed down through generations. The interview showed the passing of kimonos in a thrifed way was popular used by 'Undressed' as a upcycling process providing a background story to a garment. 'Undressed' business is based on the upcycling of pre loved sari's from Pushkar re-made into kimono inspired loungewear pieces. 'Undressed' is inspired by kimonos and celebrates the heritage, textiles and print of kimonos through combining Indian national dress, the sari a garment known for colour and pattern to celebrate both cultures rather than cultural appropriation. The kimono and "Undressed" kimono both have in common the fact they use the '(...) zero-waste strategy... growing in popularity as best practice. It not only encourages recycling of products but also aims to restructure their design, production and distribution to prevent waste emerging in the first place.' (Zaman & Lehmann, 2013). Participant 1 is a circular fashion designer and this may explain why she owns one kimono as part of a sustainable wardrobe.

Equally important, the responses show 5 out of 8 of the participants own multiple kimonos revealing it is a

repetitive piece within their wardrobe and two participants mention theirs is part of a collection. With gifting being the largest response for the reason the participants own the kimono (refer to Table 2.) This demonstrates a level of sentiment with the item of clothing. Each kimono gifted shares a narrative between the gift giver and reciprocate. The questionnaire also shows that the kimono is a part of different genres of the fashion industry as purchased from independent brands, high street, online to vintage stores showing it is a constant evolving garment within the Western fashion industry.

The qualitative data collected revealed descriptive answers when asked 'What was your reason for purchasing?' To make it easier to interpret key words were categorised into: print / pattern / colour, unique selling point, lining / drape / quality and special occasion. Results in table 2 reveal print, pattern and colour being the most popular response aligning with the narrative of nature in the literature. The visual impact of the kimono being motivation to purchasing the kimono and keeping it within their wardrobe. On reflection uniqueness is equally as important as the print, pattern and colour, when participants refers to it being a garment no one else has. The idea of exclusivity and the kimono being one of a kind for the owner alone.

Comments included '*absolutely love the colours*' '*loved the print*' '*blossom print*' '*my colour palette*' were expressed and demonstrate the aesthetics of the kimono as really important when purchasing and gifting this garment. With nature being a key narrative throughout the design of the purchase it is also key to the wearer even if the literal meaning is not always known. As Shudo (2021) mentioned 'the krane and turtle are both symbols of longevity and good luck.' Complementarily, Cliffe (2017) mentions 'Goffman assumes that clothing communicates through the surface, and in Japan, the surface and presentation of self are very important.' This could justify why surface pattern and nature are such key characteristics to the narrative of a kimono within Japanese society. Secondly, 'Undressed' mention how important the print and pattern are from the sari's when



Figure 9. *An internal view of a Muji (plain) kimono: design exclusively on the inside, satin, silk; late nineteenth century (Cliffe, 2017, p. 40)*

using them for upcycling and uses the material as inspiration for the kimono brand ‘(…) *I just really like patterns and I think that kimono (…)* or *dressing gown or whatever is a really good way of being able to express yourself.* Furthermore ‘Colour is not a feature of Japanese interior domestic decoration’ states Cliffe (2017, p. 26), therefore clothing was used to express personality, status and wealth within society. She additionally notes ‘The focus for the Japanese is using fashion as a way of representing self.’ To conclude as per the literature review and questionnaire outcomes both status and nature are two equally important narratives to the kimono. In society today narrative is not as prominent with women being representations of flowers however the kimono becomes part of the owners narrative provoking memories and sentiment.

Thirdly, when analysing the responses, comments such

as ‘*really unique piece*’ were amongst the participants. In addition ‘Undressed’ quote ‘*each sari is completely one off. You know it gives you that complete exclusivity that nobody is going to have that kimono in that design ever!*’ The ‘personal connection’ linking back to so many being gifted as shown in Table 2, ‘vintage’ the aspect of the kimono having its own narrative before the wearer purchases the garment. The idea of the kimono often being gifted forms a different type of narrative. Cliffe (2017) mentions how through a ‘…series of edges, which suggest inner layers and points to unwrapping’ like a gift how the inside, the lining of a kimono is often a beautiful pattern or colour hidden from view that only when undressing would you get to see. Figure 9 displays a formal kimono from the Meiji period (1868 – 1912) following the Edo period, where the Emperor Meiji moved from Kyoto to Tokyo and the country adapted

radical views to previous and absorbed elements Western influence. The internal right hand side as worn of the kimono has an elaborate design. When worn traditionally on the body left over right only a little flash of the design would be visible for others to see. Saito explains how 'the gesture of adjusting the hem or the sleeve is, for a man or a woman is really sexy.' (Okazaki, 2015, p. 66) The smallest amend or tweak to a kimono is a seductive symbol within the kimono movement. This however was not confirmed throughout the primary research however could have been embarrassing for the participants to potentially admit which is a limitation of the research.

Contextualising the cut, being T-shaped the kimono uses no waste when pattern cutting as it is cut to match the fabric width making it a gender neutral garment, as one size fits all. This is supported by the fact within the questionnaire both males and females wear the kimono in Western society today, even if the samples size was limited to 8 participants.



Figure 10. Left image is of a Little girl who wears a traditional kimono for Shichi-Go-San celebration (Okazaki, 2015, p. 12)

3. Journey of kimono

The kimono has a major role in global fashion and cultural exchange. 'Undressed' comments when upcycling a sari into a kimono, one sari alone includes 9 metres of fabric ideal for creating a kimono inspired garment. Undressed (2021) website mentions 'So far we have upcycled 15k meters of traditional sari silk.' This suggests there are other global links within the use of kimonos in Western fashion. The mixture of traditional Indian sari patten fabric upcycled into kimonos.

The kimono does not fall in and out of fast fashion trends, they are a constant as shown within the questionnaire where participants were asked about the length of time they have had their kimonos 34% said 0–3 years, followed by 33% 4–7 years, 20% for 8–11 years and 13% for 12–15years. Across all age ranges participants have demonstrated owning kimono for a period of time, the longer lengths such as participant 2, 5, 6 and 7 resemble a collection as participant 6 and 7



Figure 11. Right image demonstrates Participant 3 wearing his kimono on his wedding day (taken by author)

reveal when questioned. In the same way many of the responses to 'How does it make you feel when you wear it' describe physical journeys the kimono goes on for example participant 5 mentions '*...I always throw it in a suitcase and it travels around the world with me. I often wear this in the garden, relaxing with a book and a coffee.*' In addition participant 4 adds '*...I often wear this one when I'm away on holiday...being away and exploring new things. Warm memories as you embrace soon to be new ones.*' The kimono not only has become a popular garment within Western fashion, it is a garment which physically travels the world with the owner. Interestingly the kimono is selected as an item to take on holiday 'a special occasion' where people are limited to the amount of garments they can choose to take away with them.

Kimono tells the story of growth, worn on special occasions such as 'Shichi-Go-San (literally seven-five-three) a celebration for children aged seven, five and three. (shown in Figure 10) It is customary that the kids wear gorgeous kimonos.' (Okazaki, 2015, p. 12) Where formal photos are taken to commemorate the celebration. In addition special occasions such as weddings and funerals require traditional dress of kimonos. Participant 3 when asked 'how does it make you feel when wearing the kimono?' responded '*... just has an air of magic*' an emotive response suggesting sentiment and happy memories often related to special occasions. This is demonstrated in Figure 11 where participant 3 has worn their kimono on their wedding day whilst getting married abroad where they physically took the kimono on a journey. This adds to the original narrative of his kimono. Kramer (2020) states

It is for those who like to take decisions and who enjoy the challenge of coordination. The kimono wearer is usually a person who enjoys... the planning and the thinking which goes into getting dressed... kimono wearers are craft consumers who are by nature creative and dress to be in the gaze.

The results show when looking at the social context of the kimono through time, that kimono fabric and Japanese culture has been exchanged within Western society and continues to move through peoples wardrobes building upon the original narrative. Similar to Figure 2 where a day dress was re-cut using kimono fabric into a traditional Western day dress, Participant 3 alters his kimono slightly along the hem to create his own wedding look. These results show how kimonos are altered through cultural exchange and adapt to the wearers needs allowing them to build further narratives along a physical journey.

In summary kimono as Jackson, 2020 from the V&A states is 'the ultimate symbol of Japan.' Kimono has its own language, full of subtle characteristics and narratives that a trained eye can identify and understand when worn in society. Socially within the Western community the kimono is a versatile piece of clothing that evokes feeling and sentiment for the wearer and gift giver. In brief the practicalities of wearing kimono could have impacted the decline in its popularity within Japan however there is a lot of historical and social factors that will have added to this impact. From a historical aspect the kimono has evolved through Western adaptations not changed, the continued use for leisure has developed into lounge and formal occasion wear which is increasing the wear as a social movement within Japan and the investigated sample group. One key observation is the Western society does not appear to be wearing kimono in the traditional Japanese method, being floor length and tied with an obi only those trained with the knowledge of how to wear a kimono wear it in the traditional method. From a social context kimono is worn as a fluid genderless garment. It once captured historical political movements and personality expressed through art on the wearers back, today this continues however less political, celebrating the craftsmanship. Kimono is not a dying art but as the Victoria & Albert museum (2021) describe a '(...)' dynamic and constantly evolving icon of fashion, revealing the sartorial, aesthetics and social significance of the garment from the 1660s to the present day, both in

Japan and the rest of the world.'

V. Conclusion

The research has revealed a number of symbols historically communicated through the shape, fit and details of a kimono still relevant today within Japanese society such as being a t-shaped, gender neutral garment which is used to layer. The primary research revealed the Western interpretation focuses on the visual narrative as the kimono is a decorative piece which is only part of the Japanese narrative. Findings show the method of wearing and use of wear kimono has been adapted in line with society which adds to why it is still a staple in Western wardrobes. Kimono needs to be versatile to suit the wearers wardrobe and to continue being worn and physically taken on travels with the owners. Denim has been used in modern kimonos within Japan this is yet to be filtered into participants' wardrobes however it already shows how kimono makers understand fabric, comfort and care have an impact on wearers being able to wear a kimono in modern day society. To summarise the key characteristics of a kimono evolving with modern day societies needs to focus on comfort and practicality through the sleeves and fabrication. 'Undressed' mention the smaller sleeve styles are more popular than the Kimono Queen which is modelled on traditional kimono sleeves and potentially impractical for wearers lifestyles.

Hierarchy and status did not feature in any primary research results as it demonstrated how the specific traditional Japanese garment has made its way into Western wardrobes. And whilst maintaining traditional elements to identify as a kimono it has now become a regular piece of clothing where people relate to the culture in a different way, the context of a kimono has become different from historically due to the social movement.

On reflection kimono is a huge topic that once researched delivers a wide content of information. To develop this research further, the social context of a kimono could be explored in-depth to assess how a

kimono makes a wearer feel when dressed in the traditional Japanese kimono to see if there is any effect on the wearers mindfulness. In addition, as there is limited research on men's kimonos and how they are worn within society today, this subject could be developed further to understand if the gender fluid garment has changed or adapted with societal needs.

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