

# Japonism in Fashion

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*Unless we strengthen ourselves by a transfusion of fresh blood, how can we maintain our energy? And where is the civilized country—ancient or modern, far or near—that has not borrowed even a small bit its artistic culture?<sup>1</sup>*

In every period, fashion seeks sources of inspiration in many places. In the process of forming a collection of Western dress, we at the Kyoto Costume Institute repeatedly encountered, to an extraordinary extent, the image of Japan in clothing that reflected the taste for exoticism represented by the questions Samuel Bing posed in his introduction to the premier issue of *Le Japon artistique*.

A Japanese helmet, tilted to one side, is embroidered on an afternoon cloak by Charles Frederick Worth (1825-95), nineteenth-century founder of haute couture. Fabrics used for evening clothes incorporate motifs and techniques from Japanese *obi* sashes. When we dress a mannequin in an evening coat from around 1910, it is necessary to pull the collar back, like a woman's kimono, to expose the nape of the neck in order to create the intended silhouette. And when we place a 1920s' dress in storage, we fold it flat, just as we would if we were putting it in a Japanese chest of drawers—entirely different in character from the three-dimensional Western clothing of other periods. Probably most people looking at the dresses of Madeleine Vionnet (1876-1975) would not perceive them as cut along straight lines and constructed of rectangles, as are Japanese kimono; yet at every turn we were struck by their resemblance to the essential flatness of kimono.

In recent years numerous studies have documented the spread of Japanese art throughout the Western world during the second half of the nineteenth century. Japonism emerged in fashion as well, and although it appeared there slightly later than in other Western arts, it possessed sufficient potency to become an element that brought about a basic transformation in fashion. The desire to investigate these processes seemed entirely natural to those of us who study Western dress from the vantage point of Japan.

We pursued the process of this fascinating development by weaving together various characteristics of clothing: the way in which it is emblematic of a period, the formal property of three-dimensionality, the aesthetic significance of the way clothing was worn, and the relation of fashion to industry.

### **Prehistory of Japonism: *Japonse Rocken***

The word Japonism is thought to have come into use during the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Considerably before that time, however, kimono had made their way to Holland and become popular as men's domestic garments. Since 1639, more than two hundred years before the Edo shogunate ended its policy of seclusion from the outside world, the Japanese maintained cultural and commercial ties with people overseas, though the official route established by the shogunate required Japanese goods to pass through Holland, which was permitted to trade with Japan by way of its government-licensed Dutch East India Company in Nagasaki.

Engelbert Kaempfer (1651-1716), physician to the company's director in Nagasaki, wrote a lively description of their progress to Edo in the late seventeenth century for an audience with the shogun, Tokugawa Tsunayoshi (1646-1709).<sup>3</sup> The director presented the shogun with a gift and in return received a “shogun's gown” padded with silk wadding. The director's companions received similar robes, generous in cut, padded, and comfortable to wear, made of gorgeous materials, and redolent of the exoticism so popular in the Netherlands at that time. These came to be prized in Holland as *Japonse rocken* (Japanese dressing gowns).<sup>4</sup> Those preserved in Dutch museums resemble Edo-period *yogi* (thickly padded robes used by the Japanese as bedding) in their decorative patterns, cut, and manner of padding.

In 1692, 123 such garments were received from the shogunate by the licensed trading company, but due to increasing demand the Dutch East India Company had begun manufacturing Japonse rocken for the European market in the Coromandel region of India, where the techniques of hand-drawn and woodblock-printed resist dyeing were well established.<sup>5</sup> Although they were not purely Japanese, these garments also came to be called Japonse rocken in Holland, whence their popularity spread to other parts of Europe. They were called *banyan* (for a caste of Indian merchants) in England and *indienne* (“in the Indian style”) in France, which suggests that considerable quantities must have been produced in India.

### **The Development of Japonism: Kimono in the West**

It was not until the publication in Europe of books on Japan in the early nineteenth century that the island nation—until the end of the eighteenth century lumped together with China in the minds of most Europeans—gradually began to attract attention in Europe and the United States. Japanese goods were initially offered for sale in the West in the first half of the nineteenth century, but it was the advent of international expositions in the mid-nineteenth century that gave rise to a broader recognition of Japan. These expositions lifted the veil of mystery from Japan as well as other countries, and for the first time Europeans came face to face with actualities, as opposed to their representations in words and pictures. One consequence of these events was the fact that vast quantities of objects from cultures of the exotic Other streamed into Europe, a flow made possible by nineteenth-century developments in transportation and the technologies of communications and printing. What the expositions presented in this initial phase was a systematically ordered display of

various subjects under one roof. Japan, finally confronting the difficulty of continuing its seclusion policy, thus gained recognition in the eyes of the Western world.

Interest in Japan grew during the 1860s as shops selling Japanese wares sprang up in Paris and London.<sup>6</sup> Such shops became gathering places for artists and art dealers; Japanese wares captivated them. Artists scattered Japanese items—as exotic *objets*—in their paintings. Kimono were among these exotica. A black kimono, pink *uchikake* (outer robe), and sash decorated in what appears to be the *shibori* (tie-dyeing) technique are depicted in three of James McNeill Whistler's paintings—*Caprice in Purple and Gold No. 2: The Golden Screen* (1864), *Rose and Silver: The Princess From the Laid of Parelain* (1864), and *The Balcony* (1867-70)—all now in the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.. Whistler (1834-1903) himself probably owned a number of kimono and used them in his paintings in various combinations. The diary of the Goncourt brothers notes that an American painter who was active in Paris and London (presumably Whistler) frequented a shop called La Porte chinoise, which sold Japanese goods and was popular with artists, and often bought Japanese items there. This was considered outrageous behavior.<sup>7</sup>

Claude Monet depicted a vividly colored kimono in *La Japonaise* (1876, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), accurately reflecting the techniques used in the rich embroidery decorating the garment. As the artist himself remarked and as its design indicates, this kimono probably belonged originally to a Kabuki actor.<sup>8</sup>

In 1867, the year of the Exposition universelle in Paris, the Japan that was appearing in the works of French and American painters made its debut in fashion magazines as well. The *Journal des demoiselles* for October of that year carried an illustration of clothes referred to as “Japanese style.” The “dresses of Japanese silk” purchased that year by the Empress Eugénie, mentioned in the June 1 issue of *Petit Courrier des dames*, may have been Japanese kimono.<sup>10</sup> Dresses and capes made of kimono material or fashioned from pieces of kimono made their appearance in England and France in the 1860s and 1870s (see cat. nos. 3-4), and even the notable French writer, Emile Zola, noted that in the 1860s Japanese umbrellas were being sold in Paris department stores.<sup>11</sup>

## **Kimono**

In an 1882 painting, now in the Hamburger Kunsthalle, Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), whose genius was realized in portraiture, portrayed Mme Hériot, wife of Auguste Hériot, a major shareholder in the Louvre department store. Mme Hériot covers her dress with a kimono, against whose white background wisteria, flowing water, and other motifs stand out in vivid shades of red-orange, blue, green, and gold. Although Renoir's brushwork is spare, the pattern of the fabric is clearly represented, and the straight lines of the neckband and relaxed curves of the loose kimono sleeves are easily recognizable. The subject's kimono is of the type worn at the shogunal court during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century by women of the samurai class. Typically the design combines grasses and flowers of the four seasons—plum blossoms, cherry blossoms, irises, wisteria, chrysanthemums—along with more abstract motifs, such as undulating vertical lines, horizontal curves representing flowing water, and interlocking key-fret patterns on a *rinzu* (figured

silk satin) ground. That this kind of blatant sumptuousness was highly appreciated in the West is not only apparent in painting but can also be deduced from the Japanese objects of that time displayed in many European and American museums and from extant dresses of the period made from *kosode* (precursor of the modern kimono).

The subject of the portrait wears her kimono in a distinctly Western style, not tightly overlapping in the Japanese manner, but open to the waist and belted (notably her belt matches, not her kimono, but her dress). Clearly by the time the painting was executed women were wearing kimono as fashionable at-home dress and no longer using them as exotic Japanese objects. Around the same time Guy de Maupassant's novel *Bel Ami* (1885) describes its heroine as “wearing a rose silk Japanese-style peignoir, embroidered with landscapes in gold threads, birds in blue and white flowers”.<sup>12</sup> Although it is impossible to confirm that what the author referred to as a *peignoir japonais* was a kimono, the description is certainly an intriguing one.

Situations in which the wearing of kimono was considered acceptable were those in which the usual social restrictions on dress and deportment did not come into play, namely, at home or at costume balls. The exotic clothing glimpsed at international expositions made its debut in the paintings of Western artists and was worn on the stage in Japanese dramatic productions. Thus Western women of that era saw in kimono garments, which were part of the fashion for Japonism, an ease and a liberation as well as exoticism and consequently adopted them as dressing gowns.

Wide-sleeved robes for wear at home, called “Japanese matinees,” and dressing gowns of Japanese silk from Liberty and Company of London were promoted beginning in the 1880s in such women's magazines as *Harper's Bazaar*, which sometimes used the word *Japanese* to describe them. Around the turn of the century the term *kimono* came into use.<sup>13</sup>

What really added to the kimono's momentum were opera and theater, two amusements popular in France in the late nineteenth century. Japanese costume design apparently first appeared on the Paris stage in 1870, at the Goethe Theatre, but after that plays and operas about Japan were performed one after another. The *Mikado*, in which genuine Japanese-style dress plays a large part, was performed in London in 1885. In this way, knowledge of Japanese robes—kimono or kimono style garments—gradually spread, Pierre Loti, author of the popular novel *Madame Chrysanthème* (1887), saw Japanese dress as “clothing so completely different from ours that it is impossible to understand.”<sup>14</sup>

The Japanese actress Sada Yacco (1872-1946) performed in Paris in 1900. Along with the troupe led by her husband, Kawakami Otojirō (1864-1911), she had left Japan the year before and after touring America and Great Britain, made a big hit on the stage of the Loië Fuller Theater in Paris just at the time of the Exposition universelle. Her vehicle was cobbled together from *Musume Dōjōji*, a famous Kabuki play, and a suicide scene, but what Paris found so bewitching was the actress's beauty and her skill in wearing kimono. Because she was a former geisha, it was natural for her to assemble her outfits with panache and taste, but the way she looked in kimono became the sensation of Paris. Picasso did a sketch of her, and she and her kimono left a strong impression on many others in the arts, including André Gide, Paul Klee, Gustav Moreau, Nadar, Jules Renard, and Auguste Rodin.

Sada Yacco became the darling of Paris. Cashing in on her popularity, the boutique Au Mikado, at 41 avenue de l'Opéra, began selling Kimono Sada Yacco. Starting around 1903, every issue of *Femina* bore an advertisement for them. From 1905 or thereabouts *Le Figaro-Madame* often carried advertisements for the House of Babani on boulevard Haussmann, for *robes japonaises*; these Japanese style dressing gowns or garments, which could be classified as *nagajuban* (kimono under garments), were introduced as the newest of elegant peignoirs in photographs of upper-class women. These advertisements successfully made a robe japonaise from Babani a must for fashionable women.

Japan's silk export policy stipulated manufactured silk products (for which the profit margin was higher than that for silk fiber, yarn, or textiles), and silk dressing gowns were among the items exported to Europe and America under this policy. The export of silk textiles from Yokohama began with the opening of that harbor to Western commerce in 1859. As early as 1873 a Yokohama silk merchant named Shiino Shobei was ordered by the Meiji government to attend the international exposition in Vienna that year to survey the market for exports of high profit silk products to the West. One of the items he conceived was a silk dressing gown that followed European fashion in cut, which he called a "Japanese gown." Typically, dressing gowns manufactured in Japan and exported between 1880 and 1890 were made of padded and quilted *habutae*, a closely woven silk, decorated with embroidery of Japanese motifs, such as chrysanthemums and sparrows. This type of item was widely promoted in the early 1900s by both Liberty and Company and Babani, achieving notable popularity. In the United States kimono even appeared in the Sears Roebuck catalogue.<sup>15</sup>

Through this process the word kimono in contemporary Western usage has come to retain its original Japanese sense of traditional clothing and "clothing worn by practitioners of judo or karate" (Larousse) and to denote "a kind of peignoir or dressing gown that is reminiscent of a kimono." In addition, a third widely employed usage is in the expression "kimono sleeve." A straight, deep armhole like that of a kimono is called a kimono sleeve, different in cut from a Western-style armhole, which is curved to fit the shoulder and arm. Directly related to Western fashion, this meaning emerged in the early years of the twentieth century.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Introduction of Japanese Style Motifs**

Designers could not ignore the trend called Japonism. In the second half of the nineteenth century it became a broad-based stylistic movement embracing many genres and media. Japanese sensibility and the image of the kimono first made themselves known in the fashion world as textile design motifs. Through Paris fashion the Japanese style gained in popularity and spread across Europe. Lyon, which had been known for its production of silk textiles since the fifteenth century, became in the second half of the nineteenth century a vital manufacturing center for the materials of the new Paris haute-couture system. Lyon silk manufacturers competed aggressively with one another, displaying their products at the increasingly numerous international expositions. The passion for things Japanese was evident in the design motifs and weaving techniques of the textiles they exhibited.

Charles-Frederick Worth was one of those drawn to Japonism, incorporating various elements of it into his creations beginning in the late 1880s. Clothes by Worth made of Lyon silks displayed Japanese influence in embroidered Japanese-style motifs, asymmetrical placement of motifs on dresses, and a painterly approach to pattern design (*eba-moyo* in Japanese), in which the entire surface of the garment is treated as a single design field of canvas, a mode of decoration common in Japanese kimono.

Asymmetry, a characteristic of Japanese art and of kimono, was rare in Western textile or clothing design before Worth's extraordinary asymmetrical dress (cat. no. 29). A survey of dresses in the Kyoto Costume Institute collection reveals few other examples of the asymmetric placement of motifs, while most examples in the Edo-period *hiinagatabon* (kimono design books) are notably asymmetrical in composition. A good number of these kimono design books crossed the seas to Europe and America.

Beginning in 1890, Lyon textiles emphasized typically Japanese motifs, such as chrysanthemums, flowing water, flowers and birds, swallows and waves, and various grasses. These represented a clear shift in point of view, in style and subject matter, from previous Lyon silks. Chrysanthemums, a frequently featured theme, came to be favored by Westerners in part through Loti's *Madame Chrysanthème* or as a symbol of Japan's imperial family, whose images appeared in French fashion magazines. Thereafter, and until the 1920s, the blossoms appeared over and over in fashion as an emblem of Japan.

Examples in the collection of the Musée historique des tissus in Lyon clearly demonstrate that the sources of Japonism in textile designs derive from actual textiles—the materials of kimono, *obi*, and the *kesa* (stoles) of Buddhist priests. The realization of textile designs is, of course, closely tied to techniques of weaving and dyeing.<sup>17</sup> As early as the 1860s fabrics from Mulhouse, a center of French textile printing, display the type of tiny, repeated motifs seen in Japanese stencil-printed *komon* (small printed motifs) patterns. Production of these versatile *komon*-style prints, which were more informal than the haute-couture silks of Lyon, spread to neighboring countries at the turn of the century.

Until this point Japan's influence in fashion was limited to the introduction of Japanese-style motifs and the adaptation of silk weaving techniques and stencil dyeing to execute them, while the clothes themselves remained essentially European in form.

### **Form: Transition to the Twentieth Century**

Japonism in fashion soon moved toward the next stage in its development, but in order to understand what that was, it is necessary to look back at the evolution of fashion in the nineteenth century. Marcel Proust (1871-1922) described at great length and with a touch of irony, and Georges Seurat (1859-91) depicted in his painting *Les Poseuses*, (1886, Barnes Collection, Philadelphia) an opposition between clothes and the naked body. Both Proust and Seurat represented fashion as creating a form artificially perfected by means of corset and bustle, far removed from the natural shape of women's bodies. A movement arose to discard dress that constricted the body in this

unnatural way. In England the Pre-Raphaelites idealized the principles of ancient Greece and Rome and in their paintings did not portray contemporary clothing but dressed their female figures in the unfettered clothes of that ancient day and of the Middle Ages, which did not restrain the body with corsets. In response to their ideas, the architect and designer Edward William Godwin (1833-86) and others developed the Rational Dress Movement. Liberty and Company, established in London in 1875 as a shop dealing in Japanese goods, became a gathering place for avant-garde artists. Godwin was a director of its fashion section.

Elsewhere in Europe Gustav Klimt (1862-1918) and Henry van de Velde (1863-1957) attempted to break into the closed world of fashion with their innovative dress designs. For efforts such as theirs to have broader impact, however, it was necessary to await the appearance of Paul Poiret (1879-1944) on the Paris fashion scene. On the brink of the twentieth century fashion, always craving change, was about to undergo a major transformation. In 1903 Poiret began to create clothes with hints of a kimono look, and three years later proposed dresses inspired by ancient Greece and the Directoire style. At last fashion had begun to creep in a new direction, toward liberation from the corset. This brought about a new concept of clothing that placed the emphasis not on the waist but on the shoulders, which carried the dress.

Cloth fell from a woman's shoulders, creating a beautiful, smooth form that flowed from the natural drape of the fabric. Like the Greek chiton, which was constructed along the same principles, the kimono was a loose, relaxed form that contrasted with the constricted dress of nineteenth-century Europe.<sup>18</sup> Fashion, which had pursued the vanishing waistline until, aesthetically as well as physically, it could go no further, began to feel its way toward a different source of inspiration. It was then that the chiton and the kimono came onto the scene. Western fashion encountered a concept of clothing different from anything that had preceded it.

Although the influence of ancient Greece is undeniable, kimono became a more direct source of inspiration in fashion due to a set of historical circumstances whose importance has been underestimated. What lay behind the influence of kimono was the widespread diffusion of Japonism just at that time. As so delicately described in *Les Modes* in 1907, compared with the loose fitting chiton and kaftan, which were already known in Europe, the kimono was completely new.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, in contrast to the excessive ornamentation applied to Western clothing after the Middle Ages, Japanese kimono emphasized the material, the fabric of clothing, and held the beauty of textiles in the highest regard. In this respect too kimono were fresh and new. The kimono gave impetus to a transition in twentieth-century dress that went far beyond exoticism as a source of inspiration.

Poiret was still working for Worth when he introduced his kimono style coat in 1903. According to his autobiography, "It was an ample, square cut kimono, in heavy black wool edged in black satin. It had large sleeves, and, like the sleeves of a Chinese coat, they were decorated with embroidery."<sup>20</sup> As no example remains, we can only imagine it, but it must have been close to the Confucius Coat (Musée de la mode et du costume, Paris) of 1904. Poiret established his own house in 1903 and showed one Japanese-inspired creation after another. This does not mean literally Japanese in form or decoration. Even when Poiret used the word *kimono* in his autobiography, he did

not necessarily grasp the distinction between Japanese and Chinese cultures and clothes. In any case he seems to have used the word in its most general sense, to indicate something influenced by East Asia or Japan. The most important point was the rectangular cut that followed the warp and weft of the fabric and the unconfined garment that resulted from it.

In 1906 Poiret introduced his new silhouette freed from the corset for the first time since the Renaissance (aside from a short period immediately following the French Revolution when corsets were temporarily discarded). In the fashion world one designer after another showed collections deeply colored by Japonism: Poiret's dresses, House of Beer's dinner gowns, Jeanne Paquin's "Japanese coats." Beginning in 1907, the expressions *Le Japon* and *le kimono* came into general use, particularly among women, while fashion magazines ran photographs of the kimono silhouette, kimono sleeves over-lapping kimono closures, and trailing kimono hems. Expressions such as *manche kimono* (kimono sleeve), "Japanese form," and "à la japonaise" filled their pages, describing either dresses worn in kimono style or Japanese details. Japan became a big hit in fashion, and *Les Modes* provided this fascinating commentary:

*Through Japan's appearance on the stage, the "Yellow Peril" has swept Paris and Parisians. This charming "Yellow Peril" has extended its influence to fashion as well. First of all, there is no need to ask if kimono sleeves and cross-over kimono closings are too much—on the contrary, they suit the Empire silhouette perfectly and are completely contemporary, completely Parisian. And Japanese embroidery. But more than anything else, it's the coat—this nearly flat coat loosely and smoothly envelops the body... The Japonism emerging now in fashion, extremely original, demands our attention.<sup>21</sup>*

### **The Backward Glance**

In 1907 Sada Yacco made her second visit to Paris, staying four months. *Femina* interviewed her, noting her thoughts on and appreciation of kimono.<sup>22</sup> The role of kimono in Paris fashion then expanded even further. Letting the neck-band fall low in back, revealing the nape of the neck (*nukiemon*), became the fashionable way to wear kimono around 1907. In Paris kimono really meant the unbelted, sweeping form of the outer robe (*uchikake*) seen in *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints. The pose of the *mikaeri bijin*, the beautiful woman looking back over her shoulder, familiar from these prints, frequently appeared on the pages of fashion magazines.

After the introduction of the work of Hishikawa Moronobu (c.1618-94) the pose of the backward glance became a stereotype for depiction of beautiful women. It was a particularly effective composition as a portrayal, not of the woman, but of the kimono she wore, which became the subject of the picture. This was because it so perfectly realized the appeal of the garment and the figure wearing it, in other words, the decorative character of the pose. The figures in Monet's *Camille, The Woman in the Green Dress* (1866, Kunsthalle Bremen) and *La Japonaise* (1876, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) adopt a posture that might have been derived from that of the backward-glancing beauty in Japanese prints, a pose rarely seen in European painting before that



time. Monet may have discerned a correlation between that ukiyo-e pose and the trend in Western fashion—in which the bustle had replaced the crinoline during the 1860s—to emphasize the back of the skirt. Vincent van Gogh copied the *Courtesan Wearing an Uchikake* of Keisai Eisen (1790-1848) in his *La Japonaiserie: Oiran* (1887, Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh, Amsterdam), for the cover of the May 1, 1886, edition of *Paris illustrée*; Nader left a photograph of the Countess Greffulhe wearing a dress by Worth, in which she assumes the pose of the *mikaeri bijin* (1896).

The Ballet Russe performed in Paris in 1910, and stylistic elements of the sets and dancers costumes, influenced by orientalism, flooded the fashion world. Beginning in 1911, the Musée des arts décoratifs in Paris mounted a number of exhibitions of ukiyo-e works. These exhibitions had a major impact, influencing fashion as well as other arts. A loose cut creating a nukie-mon-style back neckline, kimono sleeves, a cocoon shape, and an easy drape, in addition to such details as a kimono style overlap closing and trailing hem, frequently found expression, along with the pose of the backward-glancing beauty, in the ukiyo-e-tinged illustrations of Georges Lepape (1887-1971).

### **Structure: Toward a Vision of Flat Construction**

Madeleine Vionnet not only called her clothes by names such as Furisode and Japonica but also found inspiration in the structure of the kimono itself. Stressing the loose fit and flat construction of her dresses, she created clothing that flowed over the three-dimensional form of the body from pieces cut almost entirely along straight lines. Vionnet, a longtime collector of ukiyo-e, developed the epochal idea of the bias cut, based in part on the rectangular cut of the kimono.<sup>23</sup>

Her early works, created between 1918 and 1920, feature flat construction and display the effectiveness of the obi, and the kimono sleeve (see cat. no. 60). Eventually she diverged from the rectangular forms of these clothes and toward the freer shapes of the bias cut. Even so, she must have kept in mind that exotic garment, the kimono, and its exploitation of the natural flow of the cloth. Because bias cut fabric stretches as it hangs on the body, it clings to it and drapes beautifully, creating an amazing flow of rippling cloth as the wearer moves. Through Vionnet's work twentieth-century clothing evolved ever freer principles and design developments.

In this way fashion design made a 180-degree turn from the fixed forms and fussy patterns heavily decorated with abundant frills, lace, silk flower, embroidery, tassels, and beads characteristic of Western dress through the nineteenth-century to a new kind of clothing that revealed the beauty of the body itself and enveloped it in cloth. Vionnet's pin-tucked green silk dress (c. 1925; cat. no. 61) evokes the image of a Zen garden of raked sand, itself a metaphor for the waves of the sea. Here she perfectly assimilated the rectilinear cut and construction, distilling them into an emblem of 1920s clothes. Released tucks use a functional part of clothing construction as ornamentation, carrying twentieth-century fashion design to its formal limits. Here the looseness of the cut is controlled so that the form of the woman's body within becomes completely abstract.

### **Neo-Japonism: A Statement from Japan**

During the 1930s Europe averted its eyes from Japan, Japonism, kimono, and loosely fitting clothes in general, and they quickly became shadowy memories. The attitude of Europe and America toward Japan had changed as the political situation became tense. Japan, which had seemed to Europe so fresh in the second half of the nineteenth century, had already become assimilated into many fields, losing that freshness. After perfecting the abstraction of the body's form within a Western context during the 1920s, obscuring its lines, fashion would not again choose abstraction but would move instead in the direction of faithful adherence to the curves of the body, accentuating the waist.

It was not until the 1970s that Japan once again made a strong impression on fashion. If Japonism might be defined as the Western view of Japan in the second half of the nineteenth century, the more recent phenomenon is a new fashion statement from the viewpoint of Japanese designers. *Neo-Japonism* might be a good term for it. From the beginning of the Meiji period (1868-1912) Japan embraced Western Fashion, but now Japanese designers were making inroads on the world's fashion capital itself. This was evident when Kenzo Takada (b. 1939) made his debut in Paris in 1970. Previously Hanae Mori (b. 1926) had shown dress collections in New York in the 1960s, gaining an enthusiastic reception. In the early 1970s Issey Miyake (b. 1938) and Kansai Yamamoto (b. 1944) began their Paris careers. The upheavals in fashion that occurred after the May Revolution in Paris in 1968 and continued into the 1970s were essential to the activity of these Japanese designers in Paris.

Instead of presenting their vital collections within the framework of orthodox haute couture, they turned to *prêt-à-porter* (ready-to-wear), which had been pushing its way into the creative vanguard of Paris fashion. Kenzo's clothes following popular currents, were unaffected, "*decontracte*" (casual). His designs were not based on the elegant taste characteristic of silk kimono worn by Japan's elite but took their inspiration from the everyday work clothes of the masses.

In 1974 Miyake showed a collection based on the essential concepts of Japanese clothing: flat construction and a piece of cloth hung on the body without eliminating any excess, letting gravity have its way. The space (*ma*) thus created between garment and body forms the significant difference between Western and Japanese clothes. Pioneered by Kenzo and Miyake, oversized clothes, liberated from curved seaming and darts, and layering became the standards for fashion in the 1970s. In the late 1980s Miyake once again received accolades, this time for his innovative Pleats series. The technology of pleating has, of course, existed since ancient times, but he extended the elasticity inherent in pleats beyond the boundaries of earlier clothes. Miyake turned the process upside down. By using a new method of pleating the finished garment, he created an innovative type of clothing that combined material, form, and function organically. In conceiving this original genre, he referred to traditional Japanese fabrics while at the same time exploiting the cutting-edge technology of Japan's contemporary fiber industry.

Following this current, Rei Kawakubo (b. 1942) and Yohji Yamamoto (b. 1943) jolted the fashion world in the early 1980s. Their work embodies concepts of Japanese beauty different from that of earlier Japanese designers, reflecting the use of materials, structure, and lack of external decorative elements. This "imperfection"—holes that made cloth look like rags, the removal of all ornamentation, deliberate fragmentation or deconstruction, and the resulting tolerance of a look of

poverty and seediness—shook the foundations of fashion. Their enigmatic clothes transcended Western rationalism, ignored shaping seams and darts, and broke the symmetry of what had previously been regarded as fashion in the West. Labeled avant-garde, they exerted considerable influence on young designers such as John Galiano (b. 1960) and Martin Margiela (b. 1957).

Without a doubt clothes made by these Japanese designers, although distinctively individualistic, expressed—either consciously or unconsciously—a peculiarly Japanese aesthetic. But the force of their worldwide impact was surely not due to the fact that theirs were uniquely Japanese designs. On the contrary, they proposed one type of new clothing for the future, one that went beyond the conceptual polarity of Western clothes versus Japanese clothes (and beyond “national dress” itself) as well as national borders and the boundaries of gender, standing outside the framework of the system known as fashion.

### **Toward the Twenty-first Century**

In the second half of the nineteenth century Japan encountered Europe. How was the culture that was dispatched from Japan perceived by Western eyes, and how was it eventually assimilated? In fashion the kimono made its mark first as an exotic Japanese *objet*, then came to be used as a dressing gown. After that, imitations of Japanese design motifs came in, along with the technology to produce them, and then the form and construction of the kimono were adapted and assimilated. Fashion found in the kimono a non-Western structure that would realize the nineteenth-century dream of liberation from the corset and evolve marvelously in the clothes of the 1920s. In the late twentieth century Japanese designers once again provoked contemporary fashion with ideas based on Japanese aesthetics.

Japan—a non-Western concept that provided the opportunity to refashion the relationship between body and clothing at the beginning and end of the twentieth century—may well be charged with the potential to create clothing design informed by a new universality in the twenty-first century as well. Our efforts to look for an answer to the question “What is Japan's real essence?” in the world of fashion and to shed light on one example of the reciprocity of cultures in a concrete and rational way began at the Kyoto Costume Institute. The project developed in unanticipated directions, giving us the opportunity to receive critical evaluations from wide-ranging sources in Paris and Tokyo and again to observe the results of our work in Los Angeles. At the same time we were forced to recognize that understanding the phenomenon of Japonism in fashion is a fascinating but formidable task, one approach to a multifaceted theme that encompasses society, economics, aesthetics, design, and technology.

Translated from the Japanese by Amanda Mayer Stinchecum.

## NOTES

1. Samuel Bing, introduction to the premier issue, *Le Japon artistique*, May 1888, 5.
2. According to the dictionary *Le Grand Robert* (1989), it appears first in the 1876 supplement of Emile Littré's *Dictionnaire de la langue française*. The French word is *Japonisme*. The English form, Japonism, was derived from that.
3. Engelbert Kaempfer, *Geschichte und Beschreibung von Japan* (1691; Stuttgart; Brockhaus, 1964; Tokyo: Kasumigaseki Shuppan, 1973), 2: 318.
4. Bianca M. du Mortier, "Silk Japonesche Rockts in Holland in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century," *Dressstudy*, no. 21 (1 April 1992), 6-9; and Marguaretta Blueking-Peeze, "Japanese Robes, a Craze," in *Imitation and Inspiration*, exh. cat. (Amsterdam; D'Arts, 1989), 53-59.
5. Blueking-Peeze, "Japanese Robes," 54.
6. In Paris Henri Fantin-Latour, the brothers Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, James McNeill Whistler, and others congregated at La Porte chinoise. L'Empire céleste was managed by J.-G. Houssaye, the former director of La Porte chinoise, and was in business until 1810; and E. Desoye was located at 220 rue de Rivoli from 1863 until 1888. In the 1870s Samuel Bing, who was later to found the art magazine *Le Japon artistique* (see n. 1), dealt in Japanese goods on the rue Chauchat. In London there were shops such as the then well-known Farmer & Rogers. In 1862, on the occasion of the London international exposition, the shop established a Far Eastern department, where Japanese goods were sold. East India House, the forerunner of Liberty and Company, which continues in business today, was established in 1875 and came to be known for its focus on Japanese goods.
7. Edmond de Goncourt and Jules de Goncourt, *Journal: Mémoires de la vie littéraire* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1989), 3: 742 (journal entry for 11 August 1892).
8. Monet remarked in a letter to Philippe Burty, 10 October 1875, that he depicted the "costume of a Japanese actor" (see Genevieve Lacambre, "Sources du japonisme au 19<sup>e</sup> siècle," in *Le Japonisme*, exh. cat. (Paris: Grand Palais, 1988), 163.
9. *Journal des demoiselles*, October 1867.
10. *Petit Courtier des dames*, 1 June 1867, 3.
11. Emile Zola, *Au bonheur des dames* (1883; Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 265.
12. Guy de Maupassant, *Bel Ami* (1885; Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 104.
13. The August 1898 issue of *La Mode pratique* contains an article about Japanese women's etiquette, process of getting dressed, bathing, hair care, makeup, and ways of wearing underwear and kimono. It illustrates women of the Edo period (1615-1868) in prints by Suzuki Harunobu and Hokusai Katsushika, taken directly from *Le Japon artistique*. In this article the terms *kimono* and *obi* are introduced. Although these are not the first occurrences of these words in fashion magazines, this article represents an early use of them in that context.
14. Pierre Loti, *Madame Chrysanthème* (Paris: Edouard Guillaume, 1888), 267.
15. The 1902 Sears Roebuck catalogue describes as a kimono a loose, waist-length jacket that has a certain Japanese air, 1069.
16. Valérie Guillaume, "Remarques sur la manche japonaise on l'emmanchure kimono", in *Japonisme et mode*, exh. cat. (Paris: Musée de la mode et du costume, 1996), 65-69.
17. Beginning with the donation of 464 pieces by Reybeau in 1862, the balance of the collection was purchased from the estates of Alexander von Sieboldt, Hayashi Tadamasu, and other sources (Fukai Akiko and Suo Tamami, "19 seiki kohan, Yoroppa ni okotta 'Japonism' to yobareru ugoki no nake de modo ni arawareta 'Nihon' no eikyo ni tsuite," in *Dai-ikki Fashion kenkyu Josei seika hokokusho* [Tokyo: Nihon Fashion Kyokai, 1993, 35-36).

18. Pierre Loti frequently described kimono. His view probably typifies the Western attitude: "It gives me pleasure to look at them...especially the nearly excessive ease and looseness of the clothes [kimono] they wear. The sleeves are extremely large, and it could almost be said that the girls have neither backs nor shoulders. Their clothing seems to float around them, and like tiny, fleshless marionettes, their delicate bodies disappear within their voluminous robes" (*Madame Chrysanthème*).

19. *Les Modes*, March 1907, 12.

20. Paul Poiret, *En habitant l'époque* (Paris: Librairie Grasset, 1930), 49.

21. *Les Modes*, March 1907, 8, 12.

22. "Mme Sada Yacco est à Paris!!!" *Femina*, 1 November 1907, 490-91.

23. Betty Kirk, *Vionnet* (Tokyo: Kyuryudo Art Publishing, 1991), 46.

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