

# The Transfiguration of the *Kimono*

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## Abstract

As a Japanese ethnic dress, the *Kimono* has rapidly disappeared with the burgeoning Westernization and rationalization of the Japanese lives and the rise of women into the foray of Japanese society. In recent years, *Kimono* such as *furisode* (a long-sleeved *Kimono*) and *hakama* (a formal Japanese skirt), are only popular with younger people at *seijin-shiki* (Coming-of-age ceremonies), school graduation ceremonies and *shaon-kai* (thank-you parties that students hold for their teachers). *Kimono* are no longer the traditional dress for everyday life, but have become something special <sup>1) ~ 3)</sup>.

*Kimono* are transforming with the times. The emergence of new *Kimono* and new ways of wearing *Kimono* is reacquainting Japanese with the *Kimono* as in the bygone days, and is causing the Japanese kimono to spring to life again as a resplendent garment. I hope that this will continue into the next generation.

**Key words:** *Kimono*, antique *Kimono*, transfiguration, fusion of East and West

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As a Japanese ethnic dress, the *Kimono* has rapidly disappeared with the burgeoning Westernization and rationalization of the Japanese lives and the rise of women into the foray of Japanese society. In recent years, *Kimono* such as *furisode* (a long-sleeved *Kimono*) and *hakama* (a formal Japanese skirt), are only popular with younger people at *seijin-shiki* (Coming-of-age ceremonies), school graduation

ceremonies and *shaon-kai* (thank-you parties that students hold for their teachers). *Kimono* are no longer the traditional dress for everyday life, but have become something special.

However, *Kimono*, which on the one hand have faded as a dress of daily life, are going through a resurgence as something which is nostalgic or antique, especially among the youth. Also, the recent rediscovery of “*Wa*” (Japan or Japanesque) in many fields is bringing back the good ol’ days of Japanese culture and evoking a new *Kimono* boom.

The present day clothing sense has transcended the “conventional observances” and “dressing procedures” that have previously been attributed to *Kimono*, and we can see that the *Kimono* has begun to meld into our lives.

## 2. SELECTING KIMONO AND THE ART OF DRESSING

Historically, selecting a *Kimono* has tended to hinge upon one’s mother or a *Kimono* fabric store that was well regarded. However in years of late, there have been more people whose own interests and opinions are clearer and who look for a *Kimono* that they like. Many different styles of wearing, or dressing, *Kimono* have also emerged. Free styles, which permit people to take pleasure in dressing themselves, have become central, just like Western clothes. There has been an increase in the trend for people to mix various accessories as they like, and this has allowed for a new *Kimono* outfit (Fig.1).

## 3. FUSION OF EAST AND WEST

The *Kimono*, just like Western fashion, now allows wearers to freely express their style. Since 1990, there have been many Western designs made public at the Paris Collections that embrace a motif of the “*Bi*” (beauty or aesthetics) that can be seen in the Japanese *Kimono*. This has most likely played a role in the transfiguration of the current day *Kimono* (Fig.2).

## 4. KIMONO OF DIFFERENT FABRIC

One type of *Kimono* that has emerged and is gaining popularity is a *Kimono* that is

(a)



(b)



(d)



(e)



Fig. 1 Selecting *Kimono* and the art of dressing

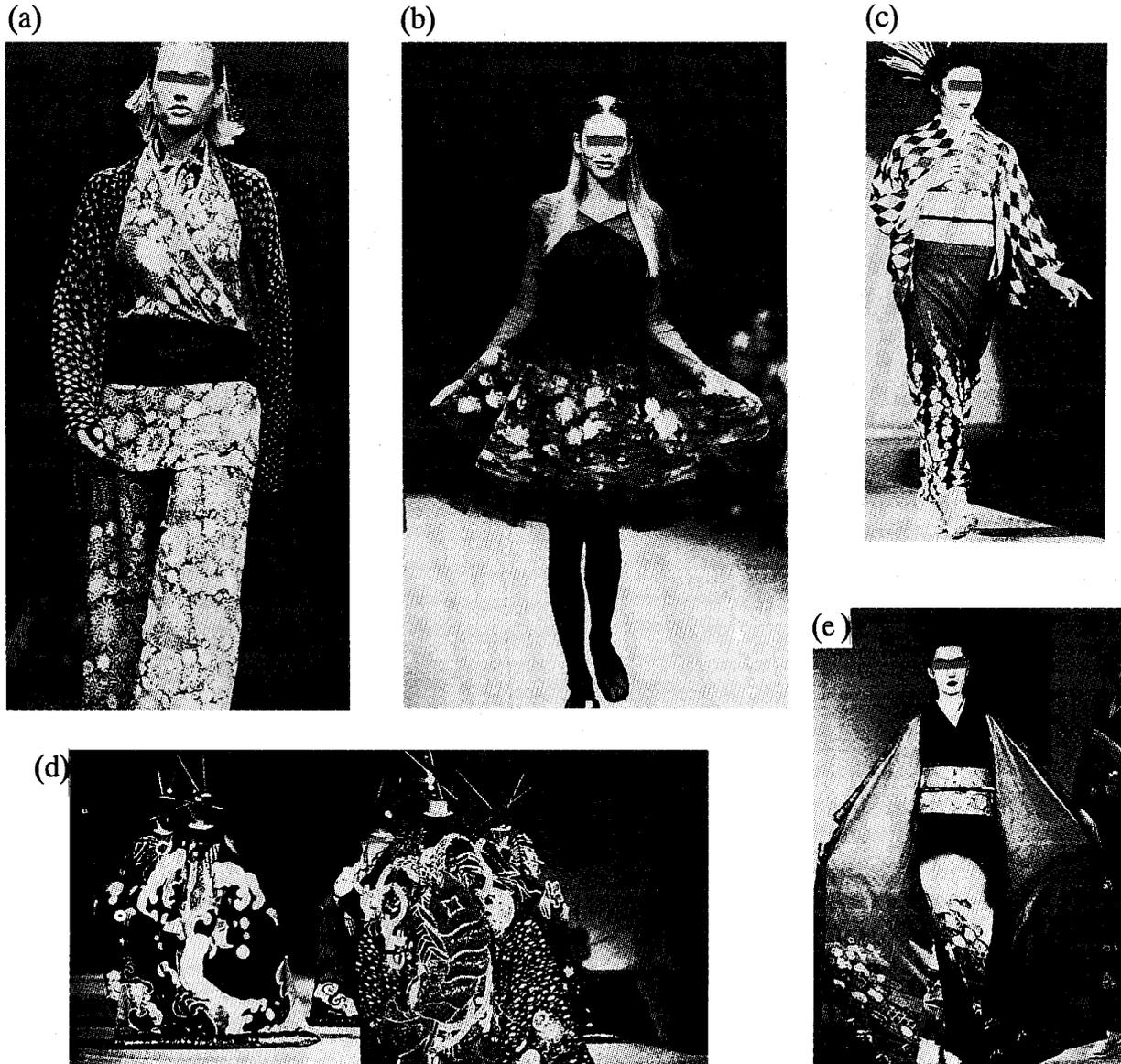


Fig. 2 Fusion of East and West

made from Western fabrics (fabric of men's suits or women's dresses), because they can be worn with a feeling similar to Western clothes (Fig.3).

## 5. CURRENT STATUS OF THE KIMONO INDUSTRY

The search for new business categories is expanding even in the *Kimono* industry. Up until now there had been a continual fear that the *Kimono* industry would peter out. However, adoration by consumers for *Kimono* of days gone by has come to the fore, and the wearing of antique *Kimono* as daily attire particularly among young

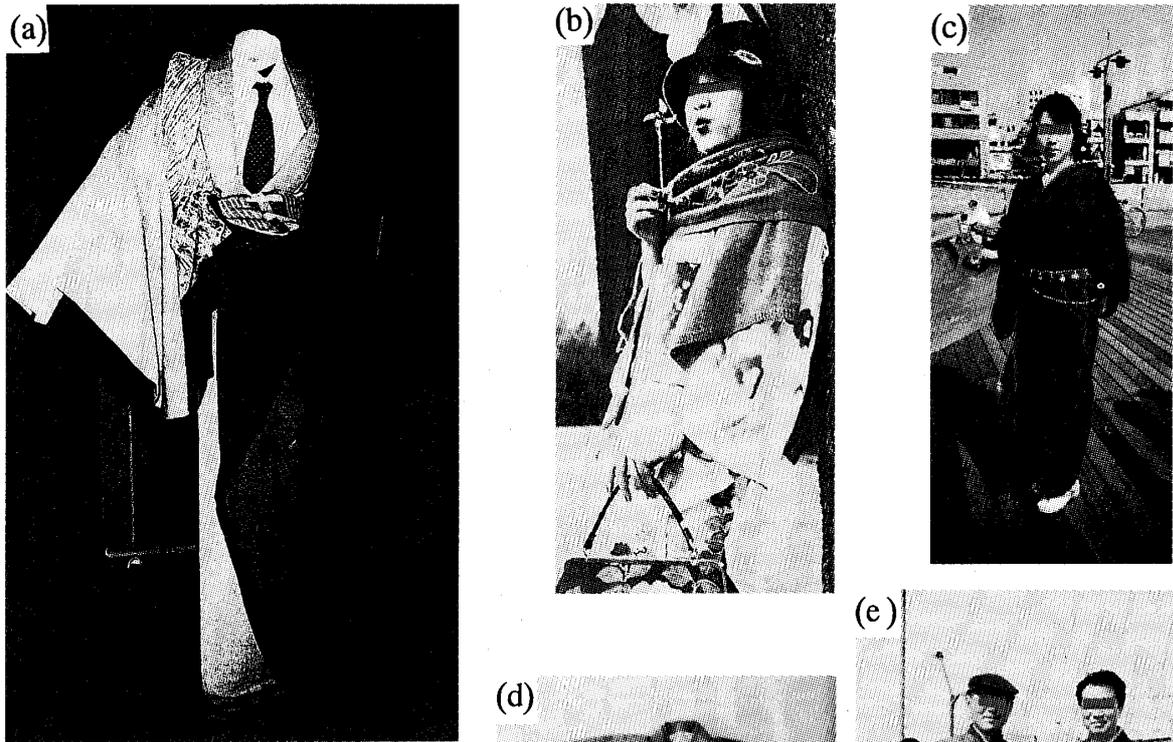


Fig. 3 *Kimono* of different fabric

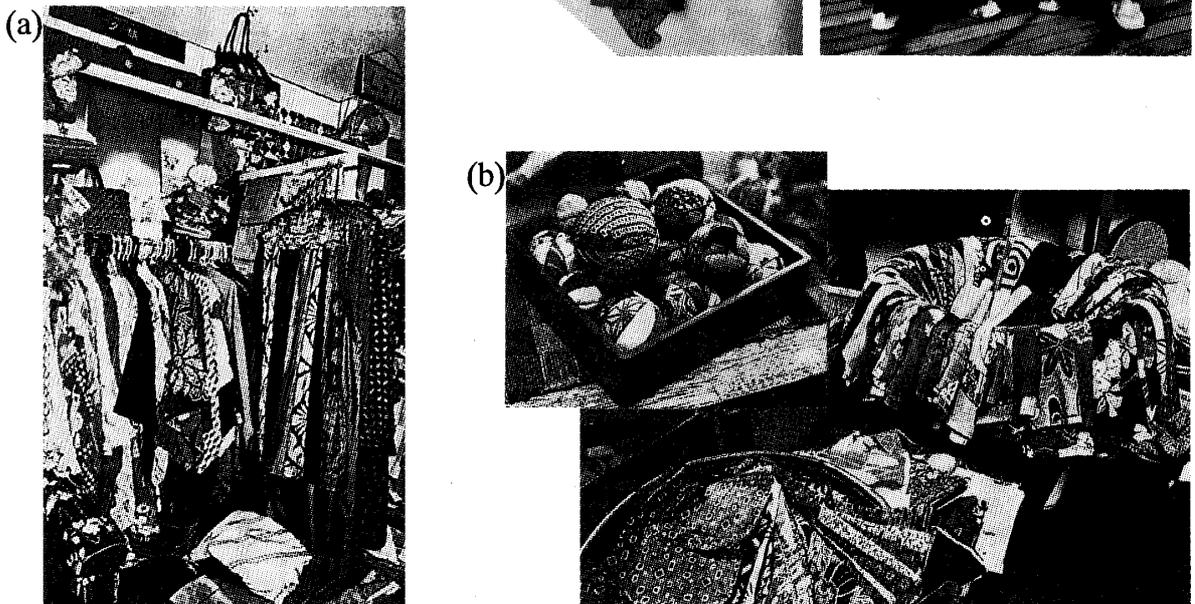


Fig.4 Current status of the *Kimono* industry

people in inner-city areas and the boom of the *yukata* (informal summer *Kimono*) are proving to be sparks-fostering action across the whole industry. Ideas for new kimono are such indicators (Fig.4).

## 6. CONCLUSION

*Kimono* are transforming with the times. The emergence of new *Kimono* and new ways of wearing *Kimono* is reacquainting Japanese with the *Kimono* as in the bygone days, and is causing the Japanese *kimono* to spring to life again as a resplendent garment. I hope that this will continue into the next generation.

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(Accepted Oct. 7, 2005)