

Negotiating Gendered Identities Through Dress:  
Kimono at the Coming-of-age Day in Contemporary Japan

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## Abstract

This thesis is a study of kimono in contemporary Japan. It builds on and extends the literature on kimono by evaluating the garment's role at the coming-of-age day. The coming-of-age day is a significant celebration aiming to inspire young women and men to become 'good and upright adult citizen[s]' (Hendry 1981: 206). Being of immense importance to the construction of Japanese identity and culture, this thesis aims to explore how normative ideas, values and meanings surrounding coming-of-age dress are negotiated and reframed in a contemporary setting.

The data for this project was generated during six months of fieldwork in Japan. I conducted interviews with kimono professionals and young adults, engaged in participants observations, and collected a wide range of different media texts. My findings demonstrate that coming-of-age dress is strongly gendered; young women are normatively considered to wear a *koten* design *furisode* kimono, maintaining an idealised image of a Japanese woman, a 'Yamato Nadeshiko'. Young men on the other hand are expected to wear business suits to recreate an impression of a reliant and self-sufficient white-collar worker, a 'proper' *shakaijin*.

Cultural norms and values are not passively and uncritically accepted, however, and I demonstrate how these normative ideals are negotiated in different ways. I discuss the ways in which parts of the kimono industry now reframe *furisode* as fashion by encouraging young women to express their self through their coming-of-age kimono. I explore how young women from a middle-class background aim to balance an expression of personal taste with the maintenance of family relations. I further consider subcultural communities in suburban, working-class areas which have created a *hade* (meaning 'flash' and 'over-the-top') style that challenges established conventions in relation to coming-of-age dress, and, with it, normative ideas of masculinity and femininity.

This thesis ultimately argues for an understanding of kimono as a versatile garment which is used by individuals as a vehicle to negotiate different aspects of their cultural and gendered identities in complex ways.

## Editing Notes

### Note on the use of punctuation marks

Dealing with complex issues relating to culture and identity, I am occasionally expressing the instability of concepts such as ‘tradition’ or ‘the West’ by placing these words in ‘scare quotes’ (Anscombe 1956). This application indicates the production of these concepts through discourses which possess an imaginative and historical dimension (see Ivy 1995). I consequently do not regard culture to be stable and fixed, but rather involved in reciprocal processes tied to identity constructions of human beings. This approach is based on a certain understanding of culture, which is defined by Robert J. Smith as: ‘[an idea of culture] represents the current state of assumptions, attitudes, meanings and ideas (including ideology in the non-pejorative sense) of the members of that society’ (1995: 34). Miller and Woodward add that academia has come to the understanding that the world does not consist of discrete units called cultures or societies which are completely homogenous and self-contained within and heterogeneous without (2012). Concepts are contested and meanings are multiple as they are constantly negotiated by actors. However, the meanings are not completely infinitive: ‘[I]t is possible to understand that a typical Argentinean is much more like most other Argentineans than like a typical or even atypical citizen of Iceland, and, at least in the case of Iceland, there is a degree of homogeneity. So, we can still discuss this pattern of variance without exaggerating it or ignoring the caveats’ (Miller and Woodward 2012: 123). Concepts such as ‘Japanese culture’ or ‘the West’ are consequently still useful, but we should be aware of their unstable and constructed nature.

### Note on Transliteration

Japanese words always appear in italics, except in the cases of words which have already become part of the English language, such as kimono, obi and yakuza.

I follow Japanese conventions for personal names throughout the thesis, stating the surname first and given name last. I additionally occasionally add the suffix ‘-san’ as a polite honorific after a person’s surname.

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## Introduction: Researching kimono

This thesis contributes to the innovative research by scholars who assess kimono from different points of view in a contemporary context. It extends the existing literature by evaluating kimono and its associated practices as part of the coming-of-age day. The coming-of-age day is a significant celebration within the context of Japanese society. Celebrated as a national holiday on an annual basis, the main aim of the festivities is to inspire young women and men to become 'good and upright adult citizen[s]' (Hendry 1981: 206). Surprisingly, the day has been largely overlooked in academic debates. The article 'Kimono and the Construction of Gendered and Cultural Identities' (1999) penned by anthropologist Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni is one of the few exceptions. This study serves as a very important point of reference for any study of dress at the coming-of-age day, and as such also laid the foundation for this thesis. The examination is mainly based on the scholar's research conducted in the 1990s, however. I therefore believe that a re-evaluation of the celebration for the contemporary period is needed. The upcoming chapter will now introduce the wider academic context of this study, as well as further elaborate on the contribution of my research.

## Kimono as a form of dress

Before introducing select studies by contemporary scholars examining kimono, I would like to briefly explain my framing of kimono as a specific form of dress. Throughout this thesis, I follow the conceptualisation of Joanne B. Eicher who defines dress as 'a highly inclusive concept that includes all varieties of body supplements and body modifications found in human cultures around the world' (2000: 422). Compared to other terms, such as clothing, costume or fashion, the term dress denotes not just the physical garments, but also encompasses other practices of making up and modifying the body in both permanent and impermanent ways. Besides the physical items of clothing, practices such as hairstyling, make-up application, and tattooing, are also included in the definition. I use the term as both the materiality of kimono, as well as the specific dress practices surrounding the garment, are of great interest to this research.

Another significant inspiration for this research is Terence S. Turner's definition of dress as 'social skin' (2012 [1980]); as a second layer of modifiable skin, dress creates a barrier between one's physical body and the outer environment. This formable aspect makes dress, according to Turner, a perfect vehicle for individuals to negotiate their personal, as well as

collective identities. Sophie Woodward has illustrated how an important aspect of self-expression and personal identity formation can be achieved through the choosing of clothing, for example (2007). Clothing and garments are a form of 'extended selfhood' which assist individuals in constructing their varied identities. As part of material culture, items of clothing are external, physical objects which, according to Woodward, can be manipulated in different ways to serve as a tool for identity construction and maintenance.

An important study illustrating some of these notions is Susanne Frieese's analysis of the selection procedure of wedding dresses. In 'A Consumer Good in the Ritual Process: The Case of the Wedding Dress' (1997), the anthropologist demonstrates how wedding dresses, at different stages in their acquisition process, assist women in negotiating their personal identity to adapt to the discourses surrounding the cultural identities of 'the bride' and later 'wife'. The first step towards this is usually the socialisation process by which the individual, through encounters with family and friends, educational institutions and media images, has learnt expected behaviours and conduct of certain roles and identities (1997: 54). The selection and acquisition of a specific form of dress supports individuals in comprehending the change of social identity. The act of trying on a wedding dress at a bridal shop prior to the wedding can support women in gaining both confidence and competence in performing the new role of the bride and wife, for example (1997: 49-50). The evaluation of others is considered as profoundly significant in this regard, with shop assistants as well as accompanying individuals showering the bride-to-be with flattering compliments, reacting to her in the same manner they would at the actual wedding. The dress fitting comes close to a rehearsal and therefore preparation for the wedding day, with the bride experiencing feelings of desirability, prominence and beauty. This process supports women in acting out the role of the central figure on the day of the wedding. After the ceremony, the chosen wedding dress might become a reminder of one's marriage commitments, and the new social role and identity of a married person (56-7). Dress in this way assists individuals in the negotiation process of adopting new social identities and roles.

Besides being a significant part in the negotiation process, dress additionally nonverbally communicates parts of our personal and social identities, relating to characteristics and aspects such as, but not limited to, gender, age, occupation, nationality, religion, taste, relationships with others, and the type of situation we are involved in (see, for example, Crane 2000, Fujita et al. 2017, Miller-Spillman 2019b, Miller and Woodward 2012,

Monden 2015). When it comes to gender, for example, Joanne Entwistle argues that: '[C]lothing is one of the most immediate and effective examples of the way in which bodies are gendered, made "feminine" or "masculine"' (2015: 141). Specific items of dress can restrict or enhance certain body movements, altering and influencing the embodied experience of an individual which comes to be experienced as 'feminine' or 'masculine' in this way. Dress is involved with the production and exchange of meaning in this way; an individual may dress and make up the body in a certain way, with both the individual, as well as outside observers, asserting meanings to the appearance (see Barnard 2002, Kaiser 2012, McRobbie 1999, Wilson 2003, Woodward 2005). These meanings can be similar, but may also differ depending on a variety of aspects.

Culture consists of reciprocal processes of human beings actively creating and shaping, while at the same time understanding themselves through it after all (see, for example, Arnould and Thompson 2005, Ivy 1995, Miller and Woodward 2012). Lois Tyson summarises this sentiment as follows: '[...] our individual identity is not merely a product of society, neither is it merely a product of our own individual will and desire. Instead, individual identity and its cultural milieu inhabit, reflect, and define each other. Their relationship is mutually constitutive [...] and dynamically unstable' (2015: 169-170). Holland et al. further add: '[I]ndividuals and groups [are] always engaged in forming identities, in producing objectifications of self-understanding that may guide subsequent behaviour. This vision emphasises that identities are improvised - in the flow of activity within social situations - from the cultural resources at hand' (1998: 4). The way in which culture and the identities constructed through it influence us is consequently not conceptualised as a linear and one-way process; rather, culture and cultural identities are shaped by and shape individuals and their way of being in complex ways, always being entwined with one another.

Cultural norms and values are in this way not passively and uncritically accepted. According to cultural studies scholar Raymond Williams, they are always retested and repositioned in each individual's mind: 'The making of a society is the finding of common meaning and directions, and its growth is an active debate and amendment under the pressure of experience, contact and discovery [...] The growing society is there, yet it is also made and remade in every individual mind' (2010 [1958]: 53-54). A complex process of negotiation is therefore always taking place between social affinity and conformity on one side, and individual agency and creativity on the other. Lived experiences are always compared to one's

own understandings, and reframed accordingly. Tyson further adds: 'Our subjectivity [...] is a lifelong process of negotiating our way, consciously and unconsciously, among the constraints and freedoms offered at any given moment in the time by the society in which we live' (2015: 270). Many different actors are involved in this negotiation process, with official and popular discourses made available by a variety of actors and institutions holding the potential to reposition the lived experience of an individual (Dasgupta 2012: 119-120). Hence, an intricate, multi-layered process of debate and negotiation is underlying all social practices. Dress, with its dual qualities of mirroring individual and collective identities, is used within this thesis to explore how bodies and minds are fashioned in contemporary Japan.

### What is (a) kimono?

The specific type of dress labelled as 'kimono' offers a particularly interesting insight into the diverse aspects of individual and social identity construction and negotiation. Within this thesis, I will explore how a wide set of values and norms are equally constructed, challenged and negotiated through kimono. The common use of the word already illustrates some of these notions. The word kimono derives from the Japanese '*kiru mono*', with *kiru* meaning 'to wear' and *mono* being 'a thing'. A kimono is therefore 'a thing to wear', and could alternatively simply be translated as 'clothing'. However, kimono today, both within and outside of Japan, commonly refers to a specific type of garment which is recognised by its t-shape form, characteristic sleeves and the use of a wide obi tied at one's waist. It was reframed as Japan's national costume through an encounter with 'Western' forms of dress during the Meiji Restoration (1868-1889).

In this thesis, I use the word kimono to indicate a general category of dress which is based on the garment's shape and practice of fitting it to the body during the fitting process, the '*kitsuke*'. I additionally follow Liza Dalby who defines the four main characteristics of the dress category of kimono as: '[A] geometrical use of standard fabric widths sewn with minimal cutting; an open, overlapping front; an attached neckband sewn around the front opening; and sleeves consisting of a width of fabric attached to the selvages' (2001: 18). One of the main distinguishing characteristics of garments in this category is the absence of an inherent shape. In its unworn form, a kimono has a completely flat surface. During the manufacturing process, no tucks or darts are added to the fabric which would provide the garment with a three-dimensional shape. Rather, the bolt of cloth from which kimono are made comes in a

standardised width, with the cutting of the fabric resulting in geometrical pieces with square outlines. This means that, on one hand, hardly any wastage is produced as part of the fabric cutting process. This specific property of two-dimensionality makes a kimono on the other hand into an ideal canvas for dyers, painters and embroiderers. Designs, and with it applied artistic influences and techniques are consequently of great significance when it comes to the garment itself; kimono can easily be socially placed and dated through an analysis of the pattern design, for example (Dalby 2001: 18, 176-78, Nitanaï 2013). Similar to general dress, the design communicates a variety of social attributes, such as the level of the perceived formality of the event the garment is worn to, as well as the seasonal context, and also personal attributes such as the wearer's gender, age, social standing and taste in this way (Dalby 2001: 164).

Whilst kimono are flat, two-dimension garments, they are fitted to the body as part of the dressing process. This dressing process is called *kitsuke*. The *kitsuke* is of great importance as it provides the final fit and shape of the garment. This does not mean, as commonly assumed, that kimono disregard and ignore the human body, however; kimono are simply more adjustable to different shapes as they are largely free of size and unisex in their unfitted form (Cliffe 2020, Dalby 2001: 20). The *kitsuke* is consequently of immense significance as the social and cultural aspects and contexts strongly determine how the garment should be worn. This aspect is exemplified by the following quote of Yamaguchi Genbei, CEO of long-established kimono house Kondaya Genbei: 'Seventy percent of what makes a kimono a kimono is how it is worn' (2021). Dalby supports this statement by declaring that: '[a] kimono and obi outfit [...] receives its ultimate judgment by the way it is worn' (2001, 206). Whilst practically being able to completely adapt to the wearer's body, the way of wearing and fitting kimono has become vigorously standardised in a post-war context, however (Cliffe 2017, Itō and Yajima 2016). These practices have sustained the idea of kimono as 'fixed', 'formal' and 'unchangeable', resulting in the image of the garment as a traditional costume. This is an aspect of the normative discourse surrounding kimono which has also been discussed in the academic literature, and which I will now introduce in the next section.

### [The academic debate on kimono](#)

Within the academic literature, two oppositional approaches towards kimono are outlined as existing in contemporary Japan; kimono either as a traditional garment, or kimono

as fashion. Sociologist Stephanie Assmann was among the first to identify these dichotomous viewpoints. In 'Between Tradition and Innovation: The Reinvention of the Kimono in Japanese Consumer Culture' (2008), the scholar illustrates the differences between kimono discourses and practices sustained by conservative and elitist *kitsuke* academies and the more playful approaches employed by kimono 'hijacking' groups. While *kitsuke* academies such as Sōdō Reihō Kimono Gakuin are governed by rules and regulations with the ultimate aim to create a 'traditional Japanese' form and behaviour, subcultural communities such as Kimono de Ginza form a rebellious counter-movement governed by notions of self-expression and group identity construction. Julie Valk's doctoral dissertation 'Survival or Success? The Kimono Retail Industry in Contemporary Japan' (2018) explores similar notions of the, on the one hand, rigid rules of the 'kimono canon' (2018: 36-37), and, on the other hand, an oppositional discourse focusing on fashion, fun and playfulness endorsed by kimono fashion networks.

While these two oppositional discourses exist, scholars nevertheless agree that kimono continues to dominantly be regarded as traditional and formal dress (see, for example, Assmann 2008, Hall 2015, Milhaupt 2014, Itō and Yajima 2016, Surak 2013). Brian Moeran and Lisa Skov have argued that a woman in kimono is one of the best-known symbols of the Japanese nation on both a national as well as international level (1997: 194-198). This representation continues to guide imagined characteristics of the garment as 'traditional', 'static' and 'fixed'. The garment is additionally embedded into in a strict discourse of the 'proper' ways of acting in it, with aspects covering movement, conduct, manners and language (Cliffe 2013, Surak 2013). The notion of one 'proper' *kitsuke*, one 'proper' way of kimono equally continues to dominate the garment's overall impression (Itō and Yajima 2016: 50-52). Due to these discourses and practices, kimono is widely regarded as a garment not suited for contemporary life and, as argued by Julie Valk, 'mainly worn out of a sense of duty and social obligation' (2017: 1).

Many different types of kimono existed in the past, with differentiations between kimono categorised as *hare-gi*, ceremonial dress, and *fudan-gi*, casual dress, part of common knowledge (Dalby 2001: 172-173). This distinction is not instantly available to a significant part of the population anymore; many of the young adults I interviewed promptly referred to ceremonial kimono when discussing kimono in general, demonstrating the strong association between the garment and notions of formality. This deeply held attitude is based on the connection between the garment and ritualised occasions; different cultural and commercial

entities position kimono as one, if not *the* most appropriate form of women's attire for ritualised celebrations. These events include the *shichigosan* rite of passage celebration for young children, the coming-of-age celebration at the age of twenty, one's own, or a relative or close friend's wedding reception and ceremony, as well as funerals (Itō and Yajima 2016, Moeran and Skov 1997, Surak 2013). Kimono are consequently closely tied to the Japanese cultural and national calendar.

This is demonstrated by Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni who has discussed kimono as part of the coming-of-age day (1999). In 'Kimono and the Construction of Gendered and Cultural Identities' (1999), Goldstein-Gidoni argues that a 'traditional Japanese femininity' is constructed in opposition to 'Western masculinity' through the different dress conventions employed for men and women at the coming-of-age ceremony; the conventional idea is that while women dress in kimono, men wear suits. Goldstein-Gidoni argues that men are constructed as active agents, while womanhood is established as passive and preservative of tradition and culture. Young women in kimono are conceptualised as 'dolls in boxes' (1999: 367) without any agency and power to act on their own accord, for example. The anthropologist consequently points out the inferior role of women within Japanese society which is symbolised through the restrictive dress form of kimono.

As one of the most important actors able to shape the discourses and practices surrounding kimono, the kimono industry has been criticised on many fronts due to its significant role in the canonisation and formalisation of the kimono discourse (Cliffe 2016, Hall 2015, Itō and Yajima 2016, Valk 2018). In *Kimono no Bunka to Nihon* (Kimono Culture and Japan, 2016), economist Itō Motoshige and CEO of kimono wholesale cooperation Yamato, Yajima Takatoshi, outspokenly criticise the general approach and stance of the kimono industry particularly from the 1970s onwards (2016: 48-86). Yajima exposes parts of the industry on several fronts; for one, the director points to the vigorous reliance on formal silk kimono (2016: 48, 70-73). This focus is, according to Yajima, mainly pursued due to the fact that a higher price can be charged for garments made out of delicate fabric. Yajima and Itō additionally criticise the strategy of marketing items and accessories as 'must haves' by framing them as 'traditional' and therefore absolutely necessary to avoid appearing ignorant and uneducated (2016: 50, see also Goldstein-Gidoni 1999: 360). The need for many items and consequent high cost involved, paired with a disregard of fashion and neglect of innovation, is, according to Yajima, the main flaw of the industry. The director consequently places the responsibility of the industry's

shortcomings, leading to the contemporary imagination of the trade as 'dying' (see Araki 2018), on the businesses themselves.

Nevertheless, scholars discussing kimono have equally focused on the many ways in which consumers engage in a more creative manner with the garment. This approach is in line with the general direction of dress studies, in which a significant number of academics now argue that a perception of traditional dress as static, fixed and symbolic does not reflect the diversity and complexity with which individuals approach these types of clothing (see Craik 1994, Hansen 2004). A variety of studies are challenging the perception of traditional dress by focusing on religious garments and practices such as veiling to illustrate that being religious and being fashionable does not necessarily exclude one another (see, for example, Kilicbay and Binark 2002, Sandikci and Ger 2005, Al-Qasimi 2010, Moors and Tarlo 2013). While anthropological studies and approaches created the idea of traditional and unchanging dress in opposition to 'Western fashion' (Fee 2013, Taylor 2004), it is now largely agreed upon that, as Elizabeth Wilson has argued, '[f]ashion, in a way, is change, and in modern society no clothes are outside of fashion' (2003: 3).

This is also the stance taken by 'kimono hijacking' groups such as Kimono de Ginza and the network around kimono shop Azumaya (Assmann 2008, Cliffe 2017, Valk 2017). These new types of consumers started to appear in the beginning of the twenty-first century, when an increased demand and appreciation of vintage kimono made headlines in Japan (Assmann 2008). This trend was pushed by enthusiasts and designers who favoured the modernist and bold patterns and aesthetics of the early twentieth century Taishō era (1912-1926) (Okazaki 2015). Kimono designs were profoundly influenced by artistic movements such as Art Deco and Bauhaus during this time, providing kimono with a 'modern' feel. Many of these designers started their own brands and opened their own shops. Examples include iroca by Narutoshi Ishikawa, Rumix Design Studio or ODASHO. These designers generally do not regard kimono as traditional dress but rather as fashionable clothing which is affordable and not too difficult to wear. Common collaborations with Japanese fashion retailers and brands such as Uniqlo exemplify this forward-looking attitude. These individuals have now recreated a lively culture of consumers bound together by the practice of donning and engaging with kimono in a playful manner, rejecting notions of tradition and formality promoted by the post-war kimono industry. Valk has dubbed these communities the 'kimono fashion network' as they aim to change the industry from within by framing kimono as a lifestyle choice (2017, 2018). This

mindset is by all means not completely new, however; performers such as geisha have been involved in the promotion of fashionable trends particularly in relation to the specific aesthetic of *iki* since the nineteenth century (Dalby 2001: 52-55, 325, Giannoulis 2013). It was only in the post-war period that kimono became increasingly disassociated from notions of fashion and fun.

In her study 'The Role of the Internet in the Revival of Japanese Kimono', Sheila Cliffe argues that this contemporary boom in kimono fashion has been to a great extent fuelled by the widespread availability of the Internet (2013). The scholar points to the massive increase of personal blogs which focus on casual kimono and, hence, reflect a growing interest in kimono (as) fashion. Cliffe regards the online environment as a liberating force which democratised kimono knowledge and practice: 'Kimono discourse is now "out there" rather than being locked into the world of kimono schools and businesses' (2013: 90). The practice of uploading informal videos has become increasingly popular, with kimono bloggers disseminating information on dressing and wearing kimono, as well as advertising their favourite boutiques and events through online media. Cliffe further argues that the Internet makes the purchase and acquisition of kimono less formal and arguably more personal; rather than having to visit an actual shop where one might feel pressured to make a purchase, online shops allow for unlimited browsing and researching of available styles and looks. The Internet has consequently allowed for more freedom and choice in relation to kimono knowledge and practices.

Based on these developments, some more traditionally minded actors in the kimono industry have recently aimed to update their crafts and production techniques. Jenny Hall (2015, 2017) describes how Kyoto-based kimono designers such as Yamada Shinji and Mori Makoto employ technical and artistic innovations to make designs more appealing to customers in the twenty-first century. Long-established manufacturing techniques, such as *yuzen* printing, *shibori* tie-dying and *nishijin* weaving, are reinterpreted by these artisans to create new and contemporary aesthetics, for example. Brands such as sousou, Kyoto Denim, and Pagong Kamedatomi have equally employed creative approaches to ensure the survival of kimono-related crafts. By doing so, these artisans and brands seek to re-frame kimono as a garment which fits into contemporary life, and not, against long held beliefs, as a garment opposed to it.

To conclude this introduction, I would like to summarise the main aims of this thesis. The main objective is to analyse dress practices and discourses surrounding kimono worn at the coming-of-age ceremony. While Goldstein-Gidoni presented an important study on the coming-of-age celebration in 1999, the article is mainly based on the scholar's research conducted in the 1990s, and is, hence, slightly outdated. I therefore believe that a re-evaluation of the celebration for the contemporary period is both useful and necessary. My focus of analysis particularly lies on the question of how normative ideas, values and meanings are established, negotiated and re-framed through dress in contemporary Japan.

Many recent studies on kimono focus on the industry and the 'kimono fashion networks' of consumers who possess a special interest in the garment (see Assmann 2008, Cliffe 2013, 2017, Valk 2017, 2018). While my thesis will certainly also discuss the industry, the focus on the coming-of-age day allows me to bring in voices and perspectives from young adults who do not necessarily possess specialist knowledge on kimono and its culture. I am therefore interested to explore how young women and men negotiate the discourses and practices surrounding formal kimono. Men's dress and perspectives have particularly been understudied in relation to kimono, so this research also aims to change this.

## Methodology

I will now outline the methodological approach used for this research project. The data for this project was generated during six months of fieldwork in Japan during which I conducted interviews, engaged in participants observations, and collected a wide variety of media texts concerning dress at the coming-of-age celebration. This chapter will provide an overview over the conducted methods, discussing the reasoning behind them as well as the analytical approach taken towards the generated data. Before delving into the details of data collection, I will first discuss my ontological position and engagement with reflexivity.

### Ontological Position and Reflexivity

When it comes to my ontological position, I consider myself a follower of the interpretivist approach. Interpretivism can be regarded as a critique of the tradition of positivism which dominates much of the research in natural sciences (Guba and Lincoln 1994). Followers of this approach consider knowledge to be collectable and quantifiable, with the researcher being an objective observer who is able to gather and analyse data in an unbiased way. The 'discovery of truth' is an important driver in this regard, with followers believing that the world can be studied in an empirical and structured way. This can arguably be regarded as a useful approach into matters of natural sciences, as well as statistical representations, but I believe that it does not hold up when it comes to inquiries into the complexity of human experiences and interactions.

Interpretivism considers these factors and, first and foremost, acknowledges and partially even embraces the possibility of bias and subjectivity within research (see, for example, Ryang 2005). The researcher, themselves not an objective and anonymous entity but a human being with a complex history, is acknowledged to actively and passively influence most aspects of the research data generation and interpretation (see, for example, Dasgupta 2013, Finlay 2002, Ryang 2005). Especially within the field of the humanities, many scholars consider interpretivism as the more suitable approach to conducting research. Visual Studies scholar Gillian Rose stresses the need to 'resist universalising claims of academic knowledge' (2001: 52) as academic knowledge is always situated and partial. Marcus Banks further elaborates and states that social knowledge is always embedded in a certain context, making it impossible to study human subjects and relations in a 'theoretical vacuum' (2001: 178). Social research should consequently be regarded as an active engagement and involvement with its subject(s),

and not as a purely and straightforwardly methods-based activity.

One of the ways to start considering research as a relationship and engagement with participants is by taking one's professional and personal position into account. Linda Finlay has argued that notions of reflexivity can serve as an important tool in this regard to 'positively embrace subjectivity' (2002: 541). This literally includes 'outing the researcher', meaning acknowledge one's positionality in regards to the research topic, and to consider how this might have affected the findings, as well as any other stages of the research which might have pushed approaches and outcomes of the study in a certain direction. This does not mean that these findings are considered any less valuable or legitimate, but it demonstrates an understanding and perspective on the social world which is complex, multi-layered and always negotiated between social actors.

To start with this endeavour, I would first like to positively embrace my own subjectivity and share a few words about my personal background and interest in Japanese culture and society. I have been interested in Japan from a young age ever since watching different anime which were broadcast on television. This interest led to a motivation to learn Japanese and live in Japan, which I did for 6-month periods, the first in 2008, and the second in 2013. I attended Japanese classes at language schools in Tokyo and Osaka during this time, and lived with different Japanese host families. Besides improving my Japanese language skills, I gained a great insight into the contemporary lifestyle and everyday practices of my host families. Moving to the United Kingdom to pursue postgraduate study in academia, the idea to conduct research on the topic of kimono was born out of a desire to combine my personal interest in Japanese culture with a professional career in academia. Considering different topics, kimono stood out as particularly interesting in an academic sense. I personally did not possess a particular knowledge on kimono before this research project. Rather, I considered kimono to be a rather conservative garment, but was interested in how young women and men negotiate their own sense of identity through it.

After having discussed my ontological position, I will now move on to provide an insight into the research design and methods employed for this study.

### Research Design, Fieldwork and Methods

To generate data for this research project, I conducted six months of fieldwork in Japan and employed a transdisciplinary and multi-methods research design. Dress sociologists such

as Yuniya Kawamura and Lise Skov have identified a lack of clearly defined methodological approaches and theoretical frameworks to the study of dress, leading researchers to adopt methods from a wide range of disciplines (Kawamura 2011: 1, Skov 2008). Aiming to examine dress at the coming-of-age day from multiple angles and perspectives, I envisioned a multi-methods research design for this study. Donna Davis, Susan Golicic and Courtney Boerstler argue that a multi-methods approach offers a richer understanding of the social world, and particularly on the relationship between cultural representations and individuals, as well as the influence of larger social structures on human beings (2011). I included participant observations, interviews and the collection of different media texts into my methodology and used these tools throughout my fieldwork to generate the data for this study

After having obtained ethical approval for the research through the University of Sheffield (see [Appendix 1](#)), I embarked to Japan in January 2018. For the six months of my residence, I was based in the city of Kyoto and affiliated with Ritsumeikan University's Graduate School of International Relations. Dr Shinji Oyama served as my academic supervisor during this time and kindly supported my research in a variety of ways. Due to the generous funding by the British Association of Japanese Studies (BAJS), I was able to not just conduct research in Kyoto, but also widen my scholarly activities to the cities of Osaka, Tokyo and Kitakyūshū.

The project evolved in unexpected ways as I gained a better understanding of the current condition of dress at the coming-of-age celebration in present-day Japan during my fieldwork. Facing a fair amount of multi-layered challenges, I embraced the advice that '[r]egrouping, reflecting, accepting mistakes, and modifying plans are four cornerstones of fieldwork' (Hays-Mitchell 2011, as cited in Billo and Hiemstra 2013: 313-314), which meant that I stayed flexible and adapted my methodological approach, when deemed appropriate, accordingly. This approach resulted in the generation of the following research data:

#### Participant Observations

- observation of the coming-of-age celebration held at Miyako Messe in Kyoto in 2018
- observation of one participant visiting a rental shop to obtain her *furisode* to wear on the coming-of-age day

#### Interviews

- Interviews with eight young adults who have participated in a coming-of-age ceremony

in the 2010s

- Interviews with nine professionals working in the kimono industry

### Media Texts

#### Print

- articles of Japanese newspapers reporting on the coming-of-age day
- *furisode* magazines and catalogues published between 2014 to 2018
- all published issues of magazines *Kimono ageha* (Inforest, 2010-2013) and *Furisode egg* (Million Publishing, 2010)
- all published issues of *Miyabi Magazine* (Miyabi, 2011-2018)

#### Moving Images

- morning television programmes reporting on the coming-of-age day in 2018
- Koda Kumi's *Aishō* (2007) music video distributed on YouTube

I will now discuss my motivations for, as well as approach towards collection and interpretation of these different materials.

### Participant Observations

Participant Observations served as an important tool to gain a deeper understanding of the dress culture surrounding the coming-of-age day. One of the main methods of cultural anthropology, Kathleen M. DeWalt and Billie R. DeWalt define participant observation as 'a method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture' (2011: 1). Discussing the merits of participant observation, Christian Tagsold and Katrin Ullmann have argued that '[p]articipant observation is essential for good fieldwork because it can add information to your research that your informants may not be aware of themselves and that you can only gain by observing, reflecting and being out there' (2020: 212). I consequently added participant observations to my methodology and scheduled my fieldwork in a way that the observation of the coming-of-age festivities in Kyoto would be the first research activity I engage in.

Arriving in Japan on January 5th, I set out to observe the outside gathering of the coming-of-age celebration held at Miyako Messe on January 8th. Before the day, I conducted

some research online to make myself familiar with the schedule of the event. Due to the great number of participants, two ceremonies were scheduled for the day, the first at 11.30 in the morning and the second at 14.30 in the afternoon. I planned to arrive at 10.00 to be able to observe the outside gatherings before and after the actual ceremony. When I arrived at the venue, many participants had already started gathering and were engaged in lively conversations with each other. I started walking around the area to gain an overview over the general set-up and scope of the event. I observed the participants dress, and made mental notes on types of clothing and styling. Following the advice of a variety of experienced ethnographers (see, for example, Emerson et al. 2007, Guest et al. 2013), I would regularly pause to write down these observations in a notebook. Due to the visual nature of dress, I also took some pictures and recorded some details of the attendees' dress through sketches.

While I originally envisioned the observation at the coming-of-age celebration in Kyoto to be the only form of participant observation, another opportunity unexpectedly arose. Having kept in touch with my host family from my stay in 2013, my host-sister Risa happened to be nineteen years old at the time of my residence. She was consequently preparing to rent a *furisode* for the coming-of-age celebration, and kindly invited me to a visit to the Osaka branch of *furisode* rental shop Kyōto Kimono Yūzen. Risa was aware of my research on dress at the coming-of-age day and wanted to support my academic endeavours by inviting me along. The visit served as a great opportunity for an in-depth insight into the lived experience of a young woman choosing a garment for the coming-of-age day. While I might have influenced the course of action of the situation, with Risa asking me for comments on the different *furisode* she tried on for example, I believe that, following the interpretivist position, an objective account of a situation is impossible, with the researcher always influencing the process of data collection in some form. Nevertheless, I employed the tool of reflexivity and also triangulation, meaning that I gained further insight into the *furisode* selection process through interviews, to minimise a one-sided bias in the interpretation of the observation.

### Interviews

Interviews served as one of the main tools of data generation for my study. A popular tool of data collection within the study of dress (see, for example, Brennen 2017, Fujita et al. 2017, Horikiri 2016, Miller and Woodward 2012) in general, and also contemporary kimono culture in particular (Cliffe 2017, Hall 2015, Valk 2018), interviews are employed to understand

the social and cultural conditions by engaging in a purposeful conversation with the participants. Yuiko Fujita (2017) has outlined the six main parts of conducting interviews for sociological research as (1) selecting participants, (2) drawing up questions, (3) requesting an interview, (4) interview explanation and consent, (5) Interview recording, and (6) transcript. This is the general approach I followed for all interviews conducted for this study, and which I will now discuss in detail.

Being interested in the culture surrounding kimono at the coming-of-age celebration in a contemporary setting, I sought out participants who play an active part in shaping the culture. With the garment being deeply embedded in commercial consumption practices (see Assmann 2008, Valk 2017, 2018), I decided to focus my inquiry on producers and consumers of kimono, and divided my participants into two groups. The first group consisted of young adults who attended a coming-of-age ceremony in the 2010s and wore a *furisode* kimono on the day. I was particularly interested in their lived experience of choosing and wearing kimono as part of the coming-of-age day in a contemporary context. From the second group of professionals, which include kimono designers, stylists, store managers, and sales executives, I intended to mainly learn more about the workings of the kimono industry.

With the two aforementioned groups in mind, I aimed to reach out to individuals in different ways to request an interview. For the first group of attendees of the coming-of-age ceremonies, I made use of my personal network which I established during previous visits to Japan, and also through participation in different activities and events during my stay. This approach brought about interviews with eight young women between the age of twenty and twenty-nine who had attended the coming-of-age ceremony in the 2010s (see Table 1). To obtain a general picture of the event throughout Japan, I made sure that they grew up in different locations, and were also not affiliated with one another.

When it comes to the second group of those working in the kimono industry, I first identified certain individuals who would be of interest to this study. I would then try to get in touch via email. One of the first persons I reached out to, and also ended up interviewing, was Tanabe Mayumi, the main editor of the kimono magazine *Kimono Hime*. Tanabe-san kindly replied to my email and invited me to the office of publishing agency Shodensha in Tokyo. She served as an important contact, introducing me to stylist Kikuchi Sae as well as sales manager Aoai Hirokazu of kimono wholesale company Kyoto Marubeni. I also visited different kimono shops, mainly in Kyoto and Tokyo, and inquired about the possibility of interviews. While some

requests were rejected, nine professionals accepted to be interviewed for this study (see Table 2). In general, I encountered an attitude of openness towards me and my research activities. Many individuals within the professional field are driven by a personal passion for kimono, and are consequently pleasantly surprised about a researcher having an interest in their activities. The fact that I am a non-Japanese citizen affiliated with a university in the United Kingdom might have also helped in this regard. Andrew Gordon has discussed how the ‘white Westerner status’, while holding some disadvantages, comes with a lot of privileges in relation to conducting research in Japan (2003: 269-271). Gordon argues that a significant number of Japanese citizens hold a relatively positive image of white Westerners and consequently aim to fulfil their requests (2003: 270). This results in easily granted access to spheres and conversations to which Japanese researchers might find it more difficult to gain entry to. This was also the experience in relation to my interviewees who all seemed as curious about me and my research activities as I was about their involvement with kimono. Most of them were consequently eager to engage with an individual from another cultural context who, although being non-Japanese, nevertheless possesses an interest in kimono.

Table 1: Interviewees Group One - Young adults who have attended a coming-of-age ceremony in the 2010s

Name	Age	Year of coming-of-age ceremony attendance	Location of coming-of-age ceremony
Aira	20	2018	Fukuoka, Fukuoka prefecture
Ami	21	2017	Okayama, Okayama prefecture
Mako	25	2014	Ritto, Shiga prefecture
Marina	24	2013	Nagara, Gifu prefecture
Mio	29	2010	Kyoto, Kyoto prefecture
Momono	21	2017	Okayama, Okayama prefecture
Risa*	19	-	-
Sayaka	28	2010	Takamatsu, Kagawa prefecture

\*At the time of the interview in 2018, Risa had not yet participated in the coming-of-age ceremony but was preparing for her attendance in the next year.

Table 2: Interviewees Group Two - Professionals working in the kimono industry

Name	Job Title and Professional Affiliation
Aoai Hirokazu	Head of Sales at kimono wholesale corporation Kyoto Marubeni
Kikuchi Sae	Kimono Stylist
Ikeda Miyabi	Seamstress, founder and CEO of kimono rental chain Miyabi, Kitakyūshū
Inenaga Shingo	Store Manager at Kimono Hearts, Naha (formerly Kyoto)
Itakawa Mie	CEO at <i>oiran taiken</i> studio Nanairo Studio, Tokyo
Ohara Chisato	Founder and main stylist at <i>oiran taiken</i> studio Arare, Kyoto
Tanabe Mayumi	Founder and main editor of kimono fashion magazine <i>Kimono Hime</i>
Yoneyama Michinobu	Founder of kimono rental shop TekuTeku Kyoto
Yoshimura Takashi	CEO at kimono wholesale corporation Taiwa

Fifteen interviews were conducted face-to-face, while the interviews with Yoneyama Michinobu and Yoshimura Takashi were conducted via e-mail. On average, the interviews lasted between thirty minutes to an hour. Two interviews were conducted in English, and thirteen in Japanese. For the young adults, I conducted the interviews in public spaces, mainly cafes and restaurants, to create an informal and relaxed environment. The interviewees with the kimono professionals on the other hand were dominantly held at their respective workplaces.

In general, I followed a semi-structured approach to my interviews. This means that I had composed a list of questions before the meetings to roughly structure the general flow,

but also left room to open up the discussion for themes that naturally arose during the interview. With the first group of participants in the coming-of-age ceremonies, I discussed the participants' preparations for the coming-of-age day, their experience of the day itself, as well as any other encounters they had with kimono. [Appendix 2](#) shows the complete list of questions. I also brought some *furisode* catalogues and magazines and encouraged the young women to comment on the content. Melinda Papp has argued that interviewees might find it hard to verbalise the meaning of a particular situation (2016: 8-9). By providing the young adults with relevant content, I aimed to assist the participants in verbalising their thoughts and feelings on kimono. For the second group of professionals working in the kimono industry on the other hand, I slightly adjusted my approach to each individual and, to gain a greater understanding of their work, gathered information on their professional activities prior to the interview. While I aimed to learn more about the industry's perspective on *furisode*, inquiring into the process of creating *furisode* designs and styles, as well as, for example, the attitude and relation to the customers, each of the nine interviews consisted of slightly different questions. [Appendix 3](#) exemplifies the questions around which I structured the interview with Inenaga Shingo, store manager at kimono rental chain Kimono Hearts.

Prior to each interview, I made sure to once again introduce myself as well as my study. I handed out information sheets summarising my research ([Appendix 4](#)), as well as forms for the young adults to provide their consent for the interview, as well as use of generated data for research purposes ([Appendix 5](#)). I additionally always asked for permission to record the interviews, and promised confidentiality in regards to the recordings. I also inquired about the use of names, and gained consent to use the full names of all professionals, as well as first names of the young adults. To express my gratitude towards the participants for supporting my study, I either paid for the consumed beverages at the venues, or made sure to bring a small gift, such as a regional sweet, from Kyoto.

After the interviews, I stored the interview audio files on a secure space on my laptop, and deleted them from my phone. I always made time to reflect on the interview afterwards, and adjusted questions for the upcoming interviews accordingly. This was particularly relevant for the participants with no professional interest in kimono, as I learnt a lot about the lived experience of wearing kimono through the conversations with them. To prepare the interviews for a rigorous analysis, I transcribed them word for word as soon as I got back to the United Kingdom. I then followed Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke's thematic analysis (2013, 2017) to

identify common themes and patterns of meaning within the interviews.

### Media Texts

To analyse contemporary media representations relating to the coming-of-age day and dress, I gathered a wide range of different media texts during my fieldwork. Regarded by many as a significant aspect of contemporary culture, media representations play an important part in the construction of the self (see, for example, Gough-Yates 2002, Monden 2015, Orgad 2012). In 'Understanding Representation' (2009), Jen Webb explores media representations from a variety of perspectives. Quoting media studies scholar Kate Bowles, one major problem with the analysis of these representations is that media representations are often considered to be one dimensional and one directional (2008: 10). Academic inquiries around how certain media representations portray people, events and ideas, as well as how these representations consequently affect the portrayed subjects are most common in media studies inquiries. Webb however argues for representations to be considered as not just as something which simply stand in for something else, but rather as something which is ontological and therefore *productive* of the world and its objects. In the scholar's own words: '[P]rocesses of representation do not simply make connections, relationships and identities visible: they actually make those connections, relationships and identities' (2008: 10). Webb bases this argument on recent discoveries within neuroscience which state that the brain is not necessarily able to distinguish between the 'real', physical world and media representations. Rather, interpretation and sense making of any object or event is a constant cognitive process: '[W]e constantly, if subconsciously, produce meanings out of the material world. Pure silence, or pure unmediated experience, is not a function of living human beings' (2008: 11). This means that the physical world does exist in its own right, but that the *relationship* between ourselves towards it is constantly mediated, negotiated and constructed. This process of sense-making fundamentally affects the perceived nature of the physical world and the objects in it.

Drawing on these accounts, I considered media representations as important mediums to study. Aiming to gain insight into the diverse discourses attached to the coming-of-age day and kimono, I collected newspaper articles, *furisode* magazine and catalogues, manga, reports on morning television programmes, and music videos, and will discuss these now in detail.

### Print: Newspapers

I have chosen to monitor, collect and analyse newspaper articles which report on the festivities and practices of the coming-of-age day. Newspaper articles have been identified as being a vital resource in examining general ideas and perceptions attached to social issues (see, for example, Allan 2010, Gough 2006, Reah 2002) as they both reflect, as well as shape general attitudes and perceptions. John E. Richardson for example has argued that ‘journalism exists to enable citizens to better understand their lives and their position(s) in the world’ (2017: 7), and that texts produced by journalists are both influenced by social practices, while also shaping them at the same time (2017: 37). I consequently consider newspaper articles as an important site to study the discourses surrounding the coming-of-age celebration as part of contemporary Japanese society.

While certainly declining in terms of their physical distribution, newspapers, with a circulation of almost forty-million in 2018 (*Nihon Shinbun Kyokai* 2019), still play a significant role in the Japanese media landscape. Besides the main national newspapers, local newspapers also play a significant role in this regard, with each of the forty-seven prefectures being able to sustain at least one regional publication (Villi and Hayashi 2017). Kaori Hayashi has argued that newspapers are an important part of the lifestyle of most Japanese adults over a certain age (2013), and consequently mirror attitudes and opinions of this demographic in significant ways.

The newspapers I monitored for this study were the three national newspapers with the highest domestic circulation (Villi and Hayashi 2015), namely *Yomiuri Shinbun*, *Asahi Shinbun*, *Mainichi Shinbun*, as well as the local and most widely circulated newspaper in Kyoto and Shiga prefecture, *Kyoto Shinbun*. I gained access to physical copies of each of the newspapers through the library of Ritsumeikan University, and scanned all relevant articles for later analysis and reference. All of the newspapers dedicated a couple of articles to the coming-of-age day, and the collection resulted in eleven articles featuring sixteen images published on January 8th and 9th, 2018. The most extensive coverage occurred on the 9th, one day after the official holiday, with all newspapers reserving at least two separate articles to the festivities. These articles most commonly consisted of a brief written report and at least one visual image, exclusively in the form of a photograph. I was focused on the visual and linguistic discourses created through the images and textual elements used in the articles, focusing on the following questions: how are the day and its festivities narrated? Which aspects of the day are particularly focused on? In which way is the clothing of the participants represented? What sentiments are communicated through the reportage? This analysis shed light on the general

beliefs and meanings attached to the festivities in contemporary Japan which I discuss in chapter one.

### Print: Magazines and Catalogues

While I was able to gain insight into the social and cultural context of dress at the coming-of-age day through newspaper articles, *furisode* magazines and catalogues were of greater interest in regards to studying specific representations of kimono. Magazines are arguably the natural site of debates on the role and (re)articulation of any dress and fashion-related object. The key aim of these magazines is to inform consumers of new fashion styles, items and trends, and are consequently an important vehicle of communication between trendsetters and followers, designers, editors, and buyers, but also the general public, among others (Kawamura 2006). This importance is particularly visible within a subcultural context, where certain magazines occupy the position of being the main circulator and mediator of the subculture's dress-related identity (Winge 2008, Reisel 2017). Additionally, but also in accordance with this, fashion magazines are an important medium for commercial brands and their companies, which hope to reach a demographically coherent audience through advertisements and product placement within the chosen magazine.

With the Japanese publishing industry being among the biggest and most active in the world (Japan Book Publisher Association 2019), Japanese dress-related magazines serve as important points of reference for cultural and social groupings, creating meaning and value by circulating information in relation to fashion, identity and style. Particularly when it comes to kimono, there is a long history of advertising specific garments through publications in this way, with the first periodicals being circulated during the early decades of the seventeenth century (Kuhn 2018). These pattern books called *hinagata-bon* informed consumers of available kimono designs and styles. As kimono were exclusively produced as made-to-order at this time, these publications formed an important part in the commercial cycle of producing and selling kimono. While the kimono industry has undergone massive changes during the last decades, kimono magazines and catalogues are still regarded as an important medium. During my fieldwork, I learnt that many kimono shops produce and circulate their own publications which they send out to potential customers, for example. I consequently believe that studying the medium of kimono magazines and catalogues is valuable, offering insight into attitudes and perspectives sustained by the industry. As I was interested in a general overview, I decided to

collect the latest issue of several of these publications. As some periodicals are released on a less frequent basis however, I also decided to take available publications released during the last five years into account. This method of data collection resulted in the gathering of a total of ten different periodicals which are

#### Magazines:

- *Furisode Kinenbi* (2017) published by Shufu to Seikatsusha,
- *Furisode Daisuki!* (2017) published by Sekai Bunka Publishing,
- *Furisode Biyori* (2017) published by Shinchosha Publishing,
- *SCawaii! x mina x Ray Furisode Perfect BOOK* (2017) published by Shufu no Tomo,
- *LARME's Furisode Japonaise* (2016) published by Tokuma Shoten Publishing, and
- *Kimono Hime's Furisode Hime* (2014) published by Shōdensha.

#### Catalogues:

- *Furisode Collection* by Studio Alice Group (2018),
- *Furisode Collection* by Wafukukan ICHI (2018),
- untitled catalogue by kimono hearts (2018), and
- untitled catalogue by TAKAZEN (2018).

While the first six publications are magazines which are published by established publishing houses and therefore purchasable in any bookshop, the remaining four publications are catalogues exclusively produced and circulated by the kimono shops themselves.

During my fieldwork, I noticed the importance of the influential *furisode* magazine *Kimono Ageha* (Inforest, 2010-2013) in shaping the popularity of a certain kimono style popular with the *age-jō* subculture, and decided to obtain all published issues for later analysis. As the periodical was out of print at the time of my data collection, I obtained second-hand copies of the magazines through commercial retailing website amazon.jp. I also came across another relevant magazine, the one-time publication *Furisode egg* (Million Publishing, 2010) in this way, and decided to include it in this study.

Another significant resource I came across during my fieldwork was the catalogue created by kimono rental shop Miyabi. The shop, which is located in the city of Kitakyūshū, Fukuoka prefecture, is a key contributor and one of the main influencers behind the

extraordinary kimono culture which was established in the city as part of the coming-of-age celebration. Operating slightly differently to conventional kimono rental shops, many of the garments handled by Miyabi are custom-made and entirely based on the unconventional requests made by their customers. The catalogue consequently does not showcase pre-made, branded kimono collections presented by professional models, but consists of photographs taken before and during the coming-of-age celebration to highlight the different outfits and stylings uniquely created by the participants themselves. According to Ikeda Miyabi, the owner of the shop, the catalogue serves as a memorial of their celebration for previous participants, while simultaneously acting as an inspirational resource for future attendees (personal interview 2018). Ikeda-san kindly equipped me with all issues of the catalogue after my interview, which provided a great visual insight into the culture and customs surrounding the coming-of-age celebration in Kitakyūshū.

As all of the aforementioned materials mainly consist of visual images, with textual elements playing a secondary role, I consulted scholarly texts which focus on the analysis of visual texts. In 'Visual Methods in Social Research' (2001), Markus Banks, in line with a diverse range of other scholars, suggests that seeing is not natural but rather constructed and therefore learnt: 'Images have no inherent para-syntactic or structural association, other than that which an interpretive community – the audience – is educated to expect' (2001: 10). The meaning attached to an image is consequently culturally constructed and, in a way 'artificially' attached; meaning might not necessarily develop out of the text itself but is rather placed as a layer on top of it. This leads to an understanding of meaning which is not stable and coherent, but rather always fluid and constantly changeable. This fluid understanding of the meaning creation process takes the active participation of social actors into account, which affect and are affected by the images. Social actors and groupings consequently have the power to change the meaning of certain texts, shaping the social knowledge surrounding visual image in diverse ways.

Consequently, going beyond the image itself is necessary for scholars conducting visual research; scholars should 'seek to say something about society or social life' (Banks 2001: 17) by taking the historical and social context into account. As a guideline, Banks suggests looking into what he calls the internal and external narrative of a visual text. The internal narrative relates to the picture, focusing on the narrative or story that the image itself communicates. So, for example, in relation to my study, the photographic representation of a model donning

kimono and particularly how this is presented would be the internal narrative of that image. The external narrative on the other hand relates to the social context that produced the image in the first place, as well as the medium the image is embedded in. Again, in relation to my study, this would be the magazine as the medium circulating the image in the public domain, as well as the company and actors behind the magazine for producing and commissioning the image. It is consequently useful to think of images not just in terms of the visuals but regard them as objects as they are always circulated within the social context of a specific medium.

I believe that this general understanding of visual research needs to be adopted to my particular case of studying dress. Julia Gaimster's 'Visual Research Methods in Fashion' (2011) was particularly helpful throughout this specific analysis. My background of studying fashion design made me aware of creative decisions affecting the design and 'look' of a kimono that might be less obvious to researchers without such a background. I paid attention to colours, motifs and patterns employed in kimono design. As many of the visual images under study were also accompanied by textual elements, I decided to not completely ignore these components but take them into account as well. In my analysis of these, I was mainly inspired by Brian Moeran's research on the linguistic components found in Japanese fashion magazines, the findings of which he published in the article 'A Japanese Discourse of Fashion and Taste' (2004). Basing his analysis on Roland Barthes's 'The Fashion System' (1990), Moeran showcases how Japanese fashion magazines consciously use language to transform garments into fashion. Moeran lists the wide range of evaluative words and phrases used by fashion editors to communicate ideas of style and taste, and which consequently create the linguistic fashion discourse. In the analysis of textual elements in magazines and catalogues, I have therefore recognised the importance of these specific terms and used them to analyse how certain discourses surrounding *furisode* are linguistically created.

#### Moving images: Morning television programmes

Similar to newspapers, morning television programmes, which are part of a category of '*waidoshō*' (literally 'wide show') programmes, play a significant role within the Japanese media landscape (Ishiyama et al. 2005, Koike 2001, Sakai and Ikegami 2007). Having been broadcasted since the 1970s, these shows cover, as the name suggests, a wide range of current affairs topics ranging from national and international politics to economics and cultural news. They are generally broadcasted live and are shown on the main Japanese television stations at

different times of the day. The broadcasts last between one to two hours on average, with different topics being neatly separated into individual segments and shown repeatedly throughout the broadcast. A panel of hosts located in the broadcaster's studio would discuss the individual segments, adding, pointing to and summarising important points to make the presented information easily digestible for the audience. The general viewership numbers average between six to ten percent, which illustrates the general popularity of these programmes. Hence, these programmes can be regarded as both reflecting but also forming the general discourses on different topics within contemporary Japanese society in a significant way.

I had noticed the programmes' significance when it comes to the coming-of-age ceremony prior to my research, and consequently decided to include them in my study. I monitored six different programmes on three different channels, namely Fuji Television's *Mezamashi Terebi* and *Tokudane!*, Nippon Television's *ZIP!* and *Sukkiri*, and Tokyo Broadcasting System's *Asachan!* and *Bibitto*. Among these, the longest running programme is *Mezamashi Terebi* which started in 1994, with the newest addition being *Bibitto* which was first broadcast in 2015. In terms of viewership, *Mezamashi Terebi* is regarded as one of the most watched programmes in its early morning time slot, receiving on average 9,3 percent viewership in 2018 (Fuji Television 2019). To access these programs, I used the television set up in the common room of my accommodation in Kyoto. I was able to record eight different segments covering the coming-of-age day in this way, five on January 8th and three on the 9th, lasting between five to fourteen minutes. I used a similar approach to the one I employed toward the magazines and catalogues, following a visual analysis inspired by Webb (2009) and Banks (2001) to make sense of the morning television reports.

#### Moving images: Music videos

Due to their relevance to the *oiran kitsuke*, I decided to include Koda Kumi's *Aishō* (2007) into the analysis in chapter six. I gained access to these videos through the video-sharing platform YouTube, which is nowadays greatly used by Japanese record companies to circulate content related to their artists. I followed the same analytical approach to these videos as I have used in my article 'Akihabara to all over the world!' - Musical, textual and visual narratives in Dempagumi.inc's *W.W.D'* which was published in The Sheffield Student Journal for Sociology in 2017. This analysis is mainly based on separating the different parts of music videos, which

include the visual, lyrical and musical components, as well as the artists themselves, to analyse the discourses and narratives underlining the music video.

#### Other contextualising materials

Throughout my fieldwork, I cultivated an attitude of curiosity and let the data collection occasionally be guided by unexpected encounters and recommendations. One of such encounters resulted in a visit to the Oya Soichi Library located in the district of Setagaya in Tokyo, for example. The library holds a vast collection of popular magazines published over the last 150 years, serving as a great place to discover commentaries and articles written on all kinds of topics aimed at the general public. I was motivated to use the library when I discussed my research with a colleague at Tokyo University who recommended the library due to its unusual but relevant collection. I did not really know what to expect, or whether a visit would be beneficial to my research, but, following an attitude of openness to suggestions from outside, I nevertheless wanted to explore the possibility of discovering research materials stored in archives. Knowing that the *oiran kitsuke* sparked some controversy, I searched for the terms 'oiran' and 'kimono' through the on-site library's database search. This resulted in the discovery of a significant article released in January of 2014 in weekly publication *Shūkan Bunshun* which now forms part of the discussion of the third section of chapter six.

Additionally, besides the more straight-forward methods of data collection I outlined above, I also engaged in a variety of activities which deepened my general understanding of kimono culture in historical and contemporary Japan. This included participating in the monthly kimono *hinagata-bon* research meetings held at Ritsumeikan University's Art Research Centre, as well as visiting a variety of exhibitions all over Japan displaying actual garments as well as depictions of people wearing kimono on *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints. Suzuki Keiko, professor at Ritsumeikan University's Art Research Centre, also kindly assisted my research by kindly sharing her knowledge on kimono patterns and culture with me. As I believe the bodily experience of wearing kimono as vital in understanding kimono, I also learnt the basics of kimono dressing by participating in *kitsuke* lessons offered by Nishina Yukiko of Kimono Style Yui#2. I believe that these engagements aided my understanding of contemporary kimono culture greatly, and consider them to be vital parts of my fieldwork.

## Thesis Overview

To lay the foundation for this study, I begin by introducing the coming-of-age day (*seijin-no-hi*) in chapter one. There is a surprising lack of academic attention given to the celebration, so the chapter aims to fill this gap in the English-language literature. I discuss the coming-of-age from a ritual studies perspective, demonstrating how, as a rite of passage celebration, the occasion constructs the separate identity categories of ‘child’ and ‘adult’. The celebration was additionally turned into a national holiday in 1947, and, hence, serving as an ‘invented tradition’ to unite the Japanese national community. While notions of continuity and timelessness are consequently of importance, flexibility is equally a significant characteristic of the occasion. This is particularly evident in the process of adapting the coming-of-age ceremony into the many regional contexts. I also discuss dress as part of this chapter, establishing its significance in the coming-of-age celebration. Through an analysis of the reportage in national newspapers, I demonstrate that specific normative discourses in relation to the participant’s clothing are strengthened; this is that young women wear *furisode* kimono, while men dress in suits for the occasion. A young woman in a full kimono ensemble has become the widely recognised symbol of the coming-of-age day, which is exemplified through the strong focus on females and their dress in the newspaper articles.

Chapter two discusses the *koten* pattern design, the ‘classical’ *furisode* design. Through an analysis of *furisode* magazines and catalogues, I investigate how the kimono industry is sustaining an image of ‘traditional Japaneseness’ through this design and the discourses surrounding it. I will illustrate that the narratives follow certain sentiments of the *nihonjinron* discourse, proposing a long cultural heritage and consequent superiority of this *koten* style over other designs. Through detailed guidance by established kimono experts, I argue that the idea of *Yamato Nadeshiko* referencing an idealised image of a refined and cultivated Japanese female, is bestowed onto young women.

In chapter three, I focus on male participants of the coming-of-age day. Men’s dress is often perceived as in need of much less care and attention in comparison to the clothing of women. However, rather than only needing to put minimum effort into their appearance, I argue that the young men’s dress at the coming-of-age day is following the principle of ‘conspicuous inconspicuousness’ (Vainshtein 2010). This means that rather than being free of social expectations, young men need to invest significant time and effort to produce an appearance which is elegant and appropriate, yet unobtrusive and seemingly effortless. A

business suit is largely recognised as the most suitable form of dress for this endeavour, with young men encouraged to reproduce an appearance of a male *shakaijin* which is largely based on the post-war figure of the salaryman. I further discuss men's formal kimono in this chapter. As men largely abandoned kimono during the Meiji period (1868-1912), both the kimono industry and young men themselves have long retained an ambiguous attitude towards this form of dress. This perception is slowly changing, however, demonstrated by the popularity of *hakama* and *haori* ensembles in a contemporary context. I argue that this increased recognition is largely informed by a female gaze, with young women wishing to dress to the coming-of-age ceremony in matching kimono ensembles with their male partners. Men's kimono has in this way been reframed as a viable option for young men to wear at the coming-of-age day.

Both chapters consequently demonstrate the continued significance of normative meanings surrounding dress at the coming-of-age day. Nevertheless, while these discourses remain influential, they are constantly negotiated by different actors. This negotiation process is the focus of the three following chapters.

Chapter four reassess the kimono industry in the present-day context. I demonstrate that the kimono industry has largely reframed *furisode* as fashionable garments in a present-day context. Consumers are encouraged to express their own sense of style and identity through a personalised kimono coordinate. The *koten* design, and the dress practices surrounding it, are in this way repositioned not as *the*, but rather as *one* viable style out of many. I will discuss the significance and influence of the *gyaru* subculture in this section who started customising their *furisode* in the 1990s by adding fashionable accessories and styling their hair and make-up in an unconventional manner. I argue that these young women inspired a different approach towards kimono which stimulated new business practices of the kimono industry.

In chapter five, I will take an in-depth look at the selection process of *furisode* kimono by young women from a middle-class background. Drawing on the lived experience of female attendees obtained through personal interviews and an observation, I illustrate how every selection of dress is part of a complex negotiation process. I demonstrate how these young women negotiate their own sense of gendered identity and social position through dress; for them, it is all about balancing an expression of personal taste with the maintenance of family relations. Mothers continue to be important tastemakers in this setting, mainly due to the

important role of managing family finances and, therefore, covering the rental fee for their daughters. Young women also employ different strategies to allow for divergence, with the *mae-dori* photo shoot an ideal opportunity to manage the production and distribution of different images of the self to various people.

Last but not least, in chapter six, I focus on divergent and *hade* (meaning bold or flashy) coming-of-age dress styles. I consider how both the *hade hakama* for men and *oiran kitsuke* for women challenge set conventions and norms surrounding coming-of-age dress. I describe the origins of the *hade hakama* in the city of Kitakyūshū, Fukuoka prefecture, and discuss its roots in suburban, working-class culture. The style is based on notions of male camaraderie, demonstrating pride in one's hometown, as well as a wish to attract attention. The *hade hakama* consequently counters the normative, middle-class image of the male *shakaijin* in this way. The *oiran kitsuke* on the other hand is a *furisode* style which is based on an alternative fit of the garment. I demonstrate that while the previously discussed standardised *kitsuke* aims to present young women as chaste and innocent beings, the *oiran kitsuke* counters this image by bringing erotic and sensual notions into the picture. While both styles are often 'othered' by cultural commentators and critics, both forms of dress are underlined by complex negotiation processes of young adults responding to gender ideals bestowed onto them from the outside, while at the same time aiming to define their sense of self in their own terms.

## Chapter 1: The coming-of-age day in contemporary Japan

This chapter will introduce the coming-of-age day in contemporary Japan. The coming-of-age day forms the social and cultural context to this study, influencing the dress practices associated with it in significant ways. It is consequently of vital importance to take a closer look at the celebration first.

In this chapter, I will discuss how parts of social identity, relating to aspects such as adulthood and nationhood, are constructed through the coming-of-age day. Through an analysis of the reportage circulated by the national newspapers *Yomiuri Shinbun*, *Asahi Shinbun*, *Mainichi Shinbun*, as well as *Kyoto Shinbun*, I will demonstrate how specific notions of adulthood and nationhood are constructed through the festivities. I will equally point out the importance of understanding the coming-of-age ceremony as a local celebration which, through its embeddedness into a regional context, becomes adapted and changed. I will further illustrate how young adults respond to aspects of the celebration in different ways, and how some of them aim to define the meaning of adulthood in their own terms. Finally, I will also refer to the significant role played by dress within this context.

### The coming-of-age celebration as a rite of passage

Celebrated annually as a public holiday on the second Monday of January, the coming-of-age day (*seijin-no-hi*) is widely regarded as a significant date in the Japanese cultural and national calendar. The day symbolically marks the transition from childhood into adulthood within the context of Japanese society, celebrating all young adults who have reached the legal age of majority over the course of the year.<sup>1</sup> This is in accordance with the civil law of Japan which grants Japanese nationals' full rights and responsibilities as proper members of society at the age of twenty. To honour the occasion, all new adults are invited to attend coming-of-age ceremonies (*seijin-shiki*) which are organised and conducted by the various local municipalities throughout the country. These ceremonies commonly consist of speeches by local officials congratulating and aiming to inspire the young adults to become 'good and upright adult citizen[s]' (Hendry 1981: 206). Other parts of the official programme include presentations by local performers, as well as exhibitions and stalls set up by national and local

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<sup>1</sup> Or, more specifically, who have turned twenty between April 2nd of the previous year and April 1st of the current year (Ministry of Justice 2020). This is in line with the schedule of many cultural institutions, such as schools and businesses, which begin the new term in April.

institutions.

Within the public discourse, the coming-of-age day is framed as a *hare no hi* ('day of *hare*'). The label makes a common appearance in the headlines of articles in national newspapers, indicating the concept's wider importance to the celebration. Within Japanese folklore studies, the term *hare* is used in opposition to the term *ke*, with both concepts being linked to the life cycle of agricultural communities; while *hare* signifies extraordinary and sacred periods which were generally ritualised, *ke* refers to ordinary and profound aspects of everyday life (*Nihon Daijiten Kankōkai* 2002, Ishii 2000 [1994], Kanda and Hyoki 2010a, 2010b, Papp 2015). *Hare* in this regard marks sacred phases and rituals which are meant to aid the spiritual revitalisation of a community's energies which have been exhausted during *ke* cycles. Some scholars argue that in pre-modern and pre-industrialized Japan, the division between *hare* and *ke* phases fundamentally structured the flow of life in agricultural communities around Japan (Konagaya 2001).

While there is a debate over the continued significance of these concepts, it is generally agreed upon that *hare* occasions remain an important part of society and culture in Japan (see, for example, Foster and Porcu 2020, Hendry 2013, Kanda and Hyoki 2010b, Papp 2016, Sosnoski 2013). Jan van Bremen has argued that while urbanisation and industrialisation might potentially be a threat to certain ritualistic practices, research has shown that this is not the case (1995: 1-2). Within contemporary Japan, this is demonstrated by the continued recognition of celebrations such as the New Year festivities in January, the star festival of *tanabata* in July and the festival to honour one's ancestors of *o-bon* in August (Kanda and Hyoki 2010b, Moeran and Skov 1997: 199, Papp 2016: 62). The popularity of *matsuri*, local festivals, additionally demonstrate that ritualistic celebrations remain valued and appreciated by a significant part of the population.

Ethnographer Arnold van Gennep studied rites of passages, such as coming-of-age celebrations, in indigenous communities and analysed the basic structure of these. In the pioneering work 'The Rites of Passage' (1960 [1909]), the ethnographer states that '[t]he life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another' (1960 [1909]: 2-3). Van Gennep proposes that social life consists of different stages here which are marked by similar ends and beginnings; birth, coming-of-age, marriage, and death are all examples of events which, within most cultural structures, mark transitions from leaving an old and entering a new stage. In Japan, such rites of passages are

recognised under the term *kankonsōsai*. Through its composition, the term references the different phases and occasions in one's life relating to the maturing process of a child (*kan*), marriage (*kon*) as well as death (*sō*) (*Nihon Daijiten Kankōkai* 2002). These specific events, and the transition which they are marking, create, according to van Gennep, 'distinctly separate social grouping[s]' (1960 [1909]: 1); in case of a coming-of-age rite of passage, it defines the social group of 'adults' against the social category of 'children.' Rituals are in this regard a helpful means to assist the individual with the acknowledgement of their new social position and role that comes with it.

This is also the case when it comes to the coming-of-age celebration which has been a significant aspect of Japanese culture and society for a long time. During the Nara (710 - 794) and Heian period (794 - 1185) for instance, coming-of-age rites such as *genpuku* and *mogi* were regularly practiced by members of the Imperial Court (Caswell 2009, Choi 2006: 75, Haga 1991, White 1993: 40-42). They took place when a young member of the imperial household reached an age between twelve to sixteen. The rites held the important function of officially including the individual into the Imperial Court and, in doing so, indicate their official status as an adult. During the following centuries, coming-of-age rites and ceremonies spread to the lower classes who adapted and appropriated them to their specific needs and conditions. In this social setting, young adult men were generally expected to work and follow their family trade, while girls were restricted in their movement and mainly kept at home for domestic training to prepare for marriage (Ishikawa 2001, White 1993: 41). Within this context, coming-of-age rites started to become legal matters which would affirm an individual's social status in relation to judicial issues such as marriage and inheritance (Haga 1991).

The sentiment of a significant social transformation and change remains relevant to the coming-of-age celebration in present-day Japan. This significance is signified through the repetitive use of the word '*kadode*' within the national newspaper reportage. While the kanji characters literally mean 'departure', the word itself is more commonly used in a formal setting to describe the start of a new chapter in one's life, where one leaves a familiar environment to enter a new and yet unknown terrain (*Nihon Daijiten Kankōkai* 2002). Young adults are described as 'coming together to celebrate a new chapter in life' (*aratana kadode wo iwai-au, Yomiuri Shinbun* 9/1, p. 29) on the coming-of-age day, and, in this way, 'making the first step towards adult life' (*otona no butai e suberi-dase, Kyoto Shinbun* 9/1, p. 1), for example. An emphasis by many newspapers is set on the idea that a transformation like this is only

happening once in a lifetime (*'isshō ni ichido'*), adding a further sense of magnitude and relevance to the celebration.

This sentiment is echoed by a significant percentage of young adults themselves; the attendance of the coming-of-age ceremony symbolises for many an important step in their lives. Results from a survey conducted by Japanese marketing research company General Research confirm that 41,6 percent of young adults regard the coming-of-age ceremony, and with it their coming of age, as an important milestone (General Research 2019). They consequently attended the ceremony to properly honour and celebrate this social transformation. An average of sixty-three percent of young adults have attended the ceremony during the last decades. Among the current population of twenty-year-olds, the number is even higher, with around seventy-five percent of young adults indicating that they have participated in the local celebrations. This means that the popularity of the event has increased in recent decades.

Besides the participation in the ceremony, another way of actively honouring one's coming of age is the composition of a *hatachi no chikai* (literally 'twenty-year-old oath') speech. The aim of these oaths is to inspire aspirations and ambition, while also presenting one's commitment towards becoming a responsible and competent member of society. Young adults customarily reflect on their dreams and aspirations for their future, while also expressing gratitude towards their various guardians, such as teachers and parents, who have supported them up to this point in their lives. The recitation of these pledges forms a significant part of the official programme of the coming-of-age ceremonies, with a couple of individuals chosen to represent all young adults.

Most newspapers included quotes of these speeches into their written accounts, manifesting the oath's perceived importance. Part of the oath of Yoneya Eri, a second-year student at Doshisha University, is recited in *Yomiuri Shinbun* for instance: 'With my dream of becoming an editor in the future, I have started working as a web-writer at university. I want to become an adult that contributes [positively] towards society' (*daigaku de ueburaitā to shite no seikatsu wo hajime, shōrai wa henshū-sha ni naritai to iu yume ga dekita. shakai ni kōken dekiru otona ni naritai*, 9/1, p. 29). Yoneya positions herself as working hard to fulfil her personal dream of becoming an editor. The student simultaneously expresses an awareness of this being a positive contribution towards society as a whole, acknowledging her social responsibilities as a 'proper' adult. Many attendees follow this notion by expressing

commitment to follow personal ambitions on one hand, but also sustain wider social prosperity in their oaths. The word commonly used in this context is *sekininikan* which describes the conscious awareness of one's responsibility as an adult (*Nihon Daijiten Kankōkai* 2002), indicating one's level of maturity and growth.

A similar sentiment is communicated in parts of Maekawa Yōji's speech which is featured in both *Kyoto Shinbun* and *Mainichi Shinbun*. The second-year student at Kyoto Sangyo University expresses his clear intentions of wanting to work in foreign trade or tourism: 'To increase my level of open-mindedness and tolerance, as well as positively affect people's perception of Japan, I would like to work in foreign trade or the tourism industry' (*kanyōsa to ningensei wo takame, nihon wo suki ni naru hito wo fuyasu tame, bōeki ka kankō no shigoto ni tsukitai, Mainichi Shinbun, 9/1, p. 24, see also Kyoto Shinbun, 9/1, p. 1*). Like Yoneya, Maekawa displays a high level of determination and ambition, which is inspired by a general aspiration for personal growth. Hence, the young man demonstrates an awareness of the impact his actions have on Japanese society as a whole. Both examples therefore communicate the young adults' social competence and advanced level of maturity, representatively showcasing the attitude and mindset which is desired from young adults at this stage in their lives. Naturally, in their representative function, young adults chosen to cite a *hatachi no chikai* are likely regarded as fulfilling certain expectations in regards to their personal conduct and capability to produce an appropriate oath and speech. They are consequently able to display a performance of a 'proper' adult which is strongly valued by the organising committee, as well as wider society.

Through the placement of certain expectations and norms onto the participants, rituals are sometimes conceptualised as possessing the tendency to be slightly restrictive. Ritual studies scholar Christoph Wulf, for example, has argued: 'Rituals have a tendency to force people to comply with their rules or to fit in and are sometimes quite oppressive' (2010: vii). Rituals, while offering security, equally assist the production of hierarchical systems of order which maintain power relations between the social classes, generations, and between the sexes. Catherine Bell has therefore placed the main purpose of ritual as consisting of social control mainly through a legitimisation and internalisation of the 'status quo' as natural and unchangeable (2009). Rituals confirm and maintain cohesion and reproduction of normative values, meanings and ideas in this way. At the coming-of-age day in contemporary Japan, the above outlined oaths highlight certain expectations and norms, with participants encouraged

to choose a similar path of life as the ones outlined in the *hatachi no chikai* speeches.

Young adults might not blindly re-produce expected norms and conducts, however, but equally shape the celebration through their own engagement with it. Kawano has demonstrated how rituals allow for multiple interpretative possibilities, with people not always accepting the same unambiguous meanings and readings: ‘people’s ritual bodies and environments provide fertile ground for nurturing diverse yet culturally patterned interpretive possibilities and for producing engaging moments of personal significance’ (2005: 2-3). Bell has also stated how rituals are interpreted by participants in very different ways (2009: 183), leading to different ways of acting and responding to rituals.

This tendency can also be observed in contemporary Japan, where different media disseminate different messages of the meaning of the coming-of-age celebration and age of majority. *LARME*, a very popular fashion magazine for young women in their twenties, promotes ideas of freedom and fun, rather than enforcing the principle of *sekininkan*, for example. In a special coming-of-age day issue, Model YUI directly addresses the readers when asking: ‘Did you enjoy your teens? Your twenties will be even more fun’ (*Jū-dai wa tanoshikatta desuka? Nijū-dai wa motto tanoshī yo, Larmer’s Furisode Japonaise* p. 126). The young woman consequently focuses on aspects of lightheartedness and enjoyment when discussing the condition of adulthood. Model Monoca further adds: ‘There will be an increase in things you are able to do [at the age of twenty], and equally more precious things and people will come into your life’ (*Korekara takusan dekiru koto ga fuete, takusan taisetsuna koto ya taisetsunahito ga fuete iku to omoimasu*, p. 125). Activities such as drinking alcohol, going to bars, staying out late, and travelling abroad were listed as some of the enterprises young adults were looking forward to. This illustrates how adulthood is defined by young adults themselves, and how this might differ from social expectations bestowed onto them; rather than placing the emphasis on responsibility and social competence, young adults look forward to personal independence and freedom from parental control once they turn twenty.

Another common narrative exemplifying the viewpoint of young adults was the question whether becoming an adult at the age of twenty actually changes one’s perspective on oneself. In an interview with nineteen-year-old members of popular idol group NMB48, the young women discuss the condition of adulthood and the implications it brings: ‘When I hear the word ‘adult’ [*seijin*], I immediately think of an adult [*otona*] but I wonder what [becoming an adult] is actually like’ (*seijin-tte kiku to sugoku otona ni omoeru kedo donna kanji nandarou,*

Shirama Miru). 'According to people who have turned twenty, one's own consciousness does not really change much (*hatachi ni natta ko ga iu ni wa, sono hen no ishiki wa tokuni wa kawaranai mitaida yo*, Yoshida Akari). 'When I asked a twenty-year-old acquaintance on what has changed, they responded that not much had' (*hatachi ni natta ko ni 'nanika kawatta!'-tte kiitara, 'iya betsuni'-tte iita*, Murase Sae) 'I see. [Turning twenty] is just one year away for us, but I also feel like not much will change' (*tashikani. hatachi made ichi-nen chottoyashi, anmari kawaranai ki ga suru*, Yaguro Huko, *Larme's Furisode Japonaise*, all quotes p. 94). The conversation illustrates the inquisitive nature of young adults who are questioning the importance placed on the day by society; while the change in age is framed as a very significant step in one's life through the national newspaper reportage, young adults themselves might not necessarily perceive a big change when it comes to their everyday lives. This, again, demonstrates the different perspectives by different media and audiences on the meanings of the coming-of-age day, as well as adulthood itself.

The question of what it really means to be an adult is also explored through the song 'Furisodehon' (2013) by popular music artist Kyary Pamyu Pamyu. The singer turned twenty in 2013 and wore a bright pink, custom-made kimono with unicorn and space inspired motifs to her coming-of-age ceremony (Ongaku Natalie 2013). She discusses the theme of adulthood through the song, with parts of the lyrics questioning the social categories of 'child' and 'adult': '[Am I] an adult? [Am I] a child? I want to keep on dreaming until the end of time, let's ride on this rhythm' (*otona nano? Kodomo nano? itsu made mo yume mitaikara, kono rizumu ni nosete*). The implication of needing to stop dreaming when one becomes an adult are expressed here, accompanied by the need to symbolically grow up to become a serious and dependent member of adult society once a certain age is reached. The singer challenges these implications and states that she would like to 'keep on dreaming forever'; she consequently seeks to always keep a part of her childhood self regardless of her age. The lyrics of the song further question: 'Will you be happy once you become an adult? Will you be sad once you become an adult? What will you do? What can you do? Is it really true that you can do those things only now?' (*otona ni nattara ureshi no? otona ni nattara kanashi no? nani suru no? nani ga dekiru no? ima shika dekinai no?*). The lyrics therefore challenge the notion of the distinctions between the social categories of children and adults, questioning whether these ideas should shape personal conduct and behaviour.

These examples demonstrate how young adults respond to social expectations in

different ways, and how some of them aim to define the meaning of adulthood in their own terms.

### Inventing a Tradition: The nationalisation of the coming-of-age celebration

Another relevant aspect of the present-day coming-of-age festivities is its characteristic as a unified, national celebration. This condition was born out of a historical context; Japan as a nation was united during the Meiji period (1868-1912), with the government implementing structural changes in education, law, and politics of which many remain in place until today (Hendry 2013, Nenzi 2008, Tipton 2015). An important step was the nation-wide setting of the age of legal majority which had varied over the centuries. In 1896, it was finally set at age twenty for both women and men (Government Administration Online, 2018, Ministry of Justice). Based on this legal implementation, the transformation of the coming-of-age celebration into a national holiday occurred out of the enactment of the Constitution of Japan in 1947 (Fujisaki 1957, Itō and Yajima 2016: 60). As part of the Public Holiday Law, the constitution included the establishment of sixteen official public holidays, one of them being the coming-of-age day (*seijin-no-hi*). It was decided that this holiday would be placed on the 15<sup>th</sup> of January. Within the constitution, the aim of the day is described as ‘celebrating young adults who have become aware of themselves as full members of society’ (*otona ni natta koto wo jikaku shi, mizukara ikinukou to suru seinen wo iwai hagemasu*, Cabinet Office Website 2020, Kobari 2005: 121).

This development of the coming-of-age celebration into a national holiday closely relates to the theory of ‘invented traditions’ put forward by Eric Hobsbawm and Terrance Ranger (1983). The scholars studied the creation of nations in the nineteenth century, arguing that institutions representing the modern nation-state used the practice of inventing traditions as a means to communicate and induct certain beliefs into the newly created national subjects. These claims were often legitimised by a sense of historic continuity. As Hobsbawm states: “Invented tradition” is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past’ (1983a: 1). Hobsbawm regards this as a phenomenon which aims to ease the uncertainty over a constantly changing modern world; the idea of stable and invariant aspects of social life aim to provide structure and ease any anxiety that might come from uncertainty and constant change

(1983a: 2).

From this perspective, the coming-of-age day was meant as a tool to unite the population of the Japanese nation under the banner of celebrating young adults' acceptances into legal majority. For the construction of the modern nation-state, a sense of loyalty and belonging needs to be cultivated among its national subjects, for example. Durkheim has indicated how rituals reinforce common values and beliefs, as well as foster emotional bonds and solidarity of the individual towards other members of their community, as well as society as a whole (1912). Hobsbawm demonstrated how existing customs and practices were modified, ritualised and institutionalised to assist the creation of an emotional identification with the national state (1983b). Rituals additionally assist the socialisation process which shapes individual behaviour, thought and perceptions. In 'Ritual Practice in Modern Japan: Ordering Place, People, and Action', anthropologist Satsuki Kawano explains how this is done: '[R]ituals often consume time, money, and effort as well as negotiation and mobilisation of a whole range of social ties [...] When successful, rituals have the power to catch attention - which creates a more valuable, powerful context for presentation and appropriation' (2005: 118). Public holidays and ceremonies are in this way used to actively stage and perform the nation (Hobsbawm 1983b: 263, 271). All of these practices aim for the creation of emotional bonds and loyalty towards, as well as identification with, one's nation. These established sentiments then secure both cooperation on the level of local communities, while also legitimating the governing authority held by the government.

While Hobsbawm and Ranger mainly focused on European nations, their analysis has been applied to the Japanese context. Sociologist Minako Saito has argued that the government of the Meiji period used rituals in a very similar way to create proud national subjects based on their European counterparts (2006: 6). This included the establishment of a hierarchical structure, as well as a clear, dichotomic division between the identities of 'men' and 'women' which would be united through a heteronormative marriage. Ritualistic practices based on Shintoism, which were promoted as being rooted in ancient tradition, bestowed ritualistic practices, such as marriage, with notions of significance, authenticity, and 'Japaneseness' (2006: 6-9). Cultural entrepreneurs and organisations in the tourism and gastronomy sector, such as hotels, restaurants, and shrines, started providing Shinto wedding packages in line with the guidelines of the government. In a similar vein, sociologist Kristin Surak has demonstrated how the tea ceremony played an integral part in the construction of

this ideology of Japan as a nation-state (2013). Tea was re-narrated as a symbol of the Japanese nation during the Meiji period, and consequently actively used to unite the national community. The main ambition of the government was to attain economic growth and stability through this positioning of the Japanese nation as equal to, but still somewhat different from, 'the West'. It can be argued that the unified celebration of the coming-of-age day was in a similar way originally meant to unite the population of the Japanese nation under the banner of honouring young adult's acceptance into legal majority.

### The coming-of-age ceremony as a localised event

However, it is important to understand the coming-of-age day not solely as a national, but as a local celebration as well. This localisation is mainly achieved through the execution of regionally embedded coming-of-age ceremonies. Ever since the 1940s, municipal governments have been in charge of managing the coming-of-age ceremony. In a contemporary context, ninety-five percent of all nation-wide municipalities held official coming-of-age ceremonies for young adults in their region (Ishikawa 2001: 3). Besides the orchestration of an official ceremony, municipal government and communities might also organise a side programme for the attendees. Sixty-four percent of those governments conducting ceremonies additionally installed a commemorative photo booth in front of the venue, while forty-one percent set-up various additional attractions for the young adults to enjoy (Ishikawa 2001: 3). As the main administrative bodies, these governments consequently hold a big amount of influence over the events. Besides the precise set-up of the event, another element to consider is the date of the ceremony. While the national holiday is officially placed on the second Monday of January, some municipalities, such as the one in the city of Kitakyūshū, Fukuoka prefecture, hold the official ceremonies on the Sunday prior to the national coming-of-age day for example. Besides the actual date of the ceremony, the choice of a venue also shapes the celebration in a significant way. The ceremony in the city of Urayasu, Chiba prefecture, is famous for taking place at the locally situated Disneyland, for example (Mishima 2020). This has resulted in the exercise of coming-of-age participants receiving high-fives from Disney characters Mickey and Minnie Mouse as part of the official programme.

The coming-of-age celebration becomes embedded into the local context in this way. This affects the celebration in significant ways. Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai has stated that, although the term ritual creates an impression of mechanical reproduction, rituals always

possess an active, productive and intentional character (1995: 210). Rituals, if they want to stay relevant to individuals and society, must, according to Appadurai, be open to change and adaptation in this regard. A loss of this adaptive nature would mean the decline of relevance for the community, which would lead to the eventual abandonment of it. Michael Dylan Foster and Elisabetta Porcu, commenting on festivals in Japan, agree that ritualistic celebrations are not rigid structures but that they are rather open to change and re-interpretation - be it due to political, ideological, aesthetic, or demographic reasons (2020). The scholars argue that: '[...] despite the value so often placed on continuity with the past, the history of [rituals] are almost never characterised by linear progression or unified objectives, but rather by innovation, debate, creativity and flexibility' (2020: 2).

Japanese studies scholar Melinda Papp (2016) has examined the childhood celebration of *shichigosan* along the aspect of adaptation and change. A rite of passage for children aged three, five and seven, *shichigosan* has become one of the most popular ritualistic festivities in a post-war context. The scholar has traced the development of the ritual, arguing that it closely followed social changes throughout Japanese society; 'family structure and norms, view on children, modes of production, consumption, and closely related economic conditions surrounding individual live' (2016: 18) all influenced the ways in which the festivities were and are conducted. *Shichigosan* is in this way not uniformly celebrated, but always open to interpretation and engagements: '[T]he meaning of the [*shichigosan*] ritual is constantly being shaped through dynamic interaction between the individual actors (family and its members), the actors in the marketplace (shops, photo studios, restaurants) and religious institutions (shrines and temples), with the media playing an intermediary role' (2016: 5). This demonstrates that the expression and negotiation of a variety of aspects, such as personal and group affiliations and identity, interpersonal relationships, economic trajectories, and social issues all shape the patterns and meanings of ritualistic festivities. The adaptation of the ceremony into the local context, as well as the change of parts of the celebration to increase the relevance for young adults, such as the decision by the city of Urayasa to hold the celebration at Disneyland, demonstrates how the coming-of-age day continues to be shaped and modified according to different factors.

In the city of Kyoto, for example, a special committee was appointed to administer the coming-of-age ceremony in Kyoto in 2001. It consists of local politicians, as well as influential business people and scholars from some of the universities based in the region. As outlined in

one of the official documents, the goals of the coming-of-age ceremony are, on one hand, to 'promote traditional Japanese culture' (*dentō-tekina nipponbunka no shinkō*), as well as, on the other to 'stimulate Kyoto's economy, including the traditional industries' (*dentō sangyō wo hajime to suru kyōto keizai no kassei-ka*, 2001). While this might demonstrate the aim of the committee to balance the celebration of the national with the local, it is difficult to assess what precisely is meant by 'traditional Japanese culture' and 'traditional industries', however. It should be noted that Kyoto is predominantly considered as one of the most traditional cities in Japan, attracting a wide range of domestic and overseas tourists who are looking for a 'traditional Japanese' experience (Surak 2013: 50). Kyoto's industries are consequently widely regarded as 'traditional' while also representative of Japanese culture in general. This is demonstrated through parts of the programme; flowers wrapped in *sagami*, a specific type of 'traditional' paper produced in the region, were handed to attendees at the ceremony in 2018, for example. The programme additionally included the performance of the 'Kyoto City Song' as well as the national anthem of Japan. A focus is consequently placed on sustaining and promoting both national and regional elements of cultural productions and thought.

Similar to the different attitudes in regards to the definition of adulthood discussed previously, the coming-of-age ceremony is equally open to personal interpretation and meanings. This is exemplified in another finding of the survey by General Research; one of the main motivations for young adults to attend the coming-of-age ceremony is to reunite with old friends and acquaintances from school. This inclination was indicated by forty-two percent of the respondents to the survey. For a significant number of attendees, it is therefore not the formalities of the event but rather the social environment which motivates young adults to attend their local ceremonies. This sentiment was also mirrored by most of my informants. Momono, who I interviewed for this study, stated: "The ceremony [I attended in Okayama] itself was a bit boring, many people were talking for a long time. I didn't really understand what they were trying to convey, though ... [The most interesting part was when] a video of our old school was shown, which was super nostalgic!". Momono's excitement was echoed in her voice, saying that she enjoyed seeing the place which used to be of such importance to her life. Therefore, rather than being inspired by the official speeches, Momono responded much stronger to a video which depicted her old school. This illustrates that, while the ceremony itself might be of interest to some young adults, parts of it might not necessarily resonate with all attendees.

A similar attitude is illustrated by Ami who told me about the following occurrence: “When the actual ceremony started, some people went in [to the hall to attend the ceremony] but some people stayed outside. I was actually kind of surprised about this, we weren’t forced to go in [...]”. And later: “Originally I thought I would definitely attend the ceremony but, in the moment, I just wanted to stay outside and hang out with my friends, which is more important to me than listening to speeches by some people I do not know”. This account further illustrates the common attitude among young adults who value spending time with old school friends much more than honouring the day by attending the official ceremony. Ami particularly stated that while she originally planned to attend the ceremony, she ultimately did not do so. This illustrates that procedures do not always follow original intentions, that individuals change arrangements and commitments due to a wide variety of reasons. In this case, an attitude seems to have developed spontaneously which resulted in Ami and her friends not attending the official ceremony; they rather preferred to spend time with one another outside of the venue. Young adults may take the liberty to celebrate the day on their own terms in this way.

This sentiment of carefreeness is not welcomed by everyone, however. Some social commentators regarded this as a negative development, believing that young adults are not taking their coming-of-age seriously enough and are therefore postponing the acceptance of adulthood and the responsibilities that come with it (Hendry 2013: 139). Sociologist Makoto Kobari points towards the discourse of the ‘ruined coming-of-age ceremonies’ (*areru seijin-shiki*) in this regard (2005). This discourse and the general anxiety attached to it has been fuelled by newspapers and television programmes which, since the late 1990s, are circulating stories on the childish and indecent behaviours of some attendees (Ishikawa 2001: 1, Kobari 2005: 126). It was particularly an incident in 1999 which received heightened attention. When Egyptologist Yoshimura Sakuji of Waseda University gave a speech at the ceremony in the city of Sendai, Miyagi prefecture, many young adults engaged in private conversations or looked at their mobile phones rather than listening to the address (*Asahi Shinbun* 1999, Kobari 2005: 119). The renowned professor consequently stopped his speech to scold the attendees during the ceremony. This led to the publication of an official statement by the mayor of the town, Fujii Hajimu, apologising for the young adults’ disrespectful behaviour. Ever since, stories of young adults consuming alcohol in public or interrupting the official programme of the ceremony have been circulated by the national media, sustaining notions of a ‘moral panic’ over the lack of manners and maturity of young adults.

Another point of anxiety is the perceived loss of the 'tradition' of ceremonial occasions such as the coming-of-age rite of passage. Kenji Ishii argues that in contemporary consumer society, *hare* festivities are mainly used and exploited by commercial industries as vehicles to drive sale numbers through the production and marketing of specialised themed products (2009). The scholar fears that, due to the continued modernisation and urbanisation efforts pursued in the post-war period, a community-based lifestyle has been replaced by tendencies of plurality and individualisation which is largely supported by contemporary consumption practices. Taking the ceremonies of the coming-of-age as an example, Ishii argues that the ritualised practice in its contemporary form has lost its impact and significance when it comes to bestowing a sense of adulthood and responsibility onto the participants (2009: 204-205), leading to such scenes as outlined above.

Melinda Papp however reminds us to be wary of such one-sided portrayals and arguments. The scholar argues that commercial activities have always played a role in rituals, and that this does not mean that the festivities now are less 'authentic' in any way (2016: 61-2). Commercial activities can rather be regarded as supporting the local economy while also assisting individuals in their daily life to create meaning and purpose. To say that one aspect excludes the other greatly oversimplifies these processes. For some conservative social commentators, '[t]he slightest change in ritual form is often perceived as evidence of the loss of authenticity also because adherence to tradition and to an unchanging stable pattern and meaning is commonly judged as the legitimating force of the ritual's authenticity' (2016: 19), however. According to Papp, plurality and individualisation are not completely negative but rather provide individuals with more freedom of expression and choices when it comes to life patterns and views (2016: 75). Minako Saito agrees and argues that individuals can in this way customise and individualise rituals and are in this way free to create and sustain their own traditions (2006). Lessened constraints enforced by national, cultural and social considerations allow the possibility to create one's own interpretation of an occasion. This alternative approach, according to Saito, fosters inclusivity for many people who might formally have been excluded from rituals. Any adjustment of the normative ideas surrounding the coming-of-age ceremony consequently open up possibilities and create greater inclusivity and diversity on the way.

## An introduction to dress at the coming-of-age day



Image 1: Dress styles of young women at the coming-of-age ceremony in Kyoto in 2018. Sketch composed by the author.

Dress plays a significant role in ritualised celebrations. As discussed in the introduction, dress relates to objects, such as specific garments and accessories, as well as bodily supplements and modification, such as hair styling and make-up application (Eicher 2000: 422). These objects and practices are classified as immensely important to the construction of the ritual experience; they are able to convey symbolic meanings and messages to the ritual actors, as well as their surrounding (Kalland 1995: 163, Papp 2016: 183). Historical coming-of-age rites in Japan, such as the earlier mentioned *genpuku* and *mogi* included dress as a significant element to symbolise and manifest the social change which was tied to becoming an adult. As part of the *mogi* rite conducted for young women, for example, an older female relative would tie up and style the participant's hair which was kept long and flowing until this point (Caswell 2009: 7, Choi 2006: 74, White 1993: 41). This procedure was called *kami-age* and finalised the transformation of a child into a woman. This procedure is somewhat similar to the *genpuku*

rite for young men during which the participant's hair was cut short. This was followed by a crowning with an *eboshi*, the black-lacquered headgear worn by all noble adult men (Caswell 2009: 8, Haga 1991). Dress in this way assisted in the creation and performance of a new identity and social role.

Dress also plays an important part in the coming-of-age celebration in contemporary times. This importance is exemplified in the newspaper reportage, with none of the articles failing to mention the attendees' dress. The attire is often described as *hare-gi* ('*hare* wear', or festive dress) in this regard. Melinda Papp explains how, in the Japanese context, a clear distinction is made between everyday wear and festive dress (2016: 187). Everyday wear used to be referred to as *ke-gi*, referencing the previously explained notion of *ke*, linked to profoundness and ordinariness of everyday life. Festive dress was and still remains to be linguistically labeled as *hare-gi*. Numerous folk customs used to be established around the first donning of a new *hare-gi*; a *shinchō no aisatsu* (literally 'greetings of the newly made') prayer was commonly offered at the village shrine to mark the occasion, for example. Whilst such practices are not officially observed anymore, the simple labelling of the attendees' dress as *hare-gi* elevates the dress of the young adults to realm of the sacred and extraordinary, which is similar to the previously explained connotation which is invoked of labelling the coming-of-age day a 'day of *hare*'.

Scholars have argued that ceremonial dress often follows specific conventions and norms, non-verbally expressing significant values and beliefs, as well as rules and guidance on what is deemed as appropriate behaviour and conduct (Frieze 1997, Kalland 1995, Miller-Spillman 2019b). These notions are certainly of importance when it comes to dress at the coming-of-age day, where certain norms in relation to gender have been established; women are expected to dress in kimono, whilst men are envisioned as wearing suits. These norms are disseminated and manifested by the national newspapers. Within all images throughout the articles, young women are exclusively depicted as being dressed in full kimono ensembles, while young men are without exception represented as wearing a suit matched with a collared shirt and tie (see image 2 for an example). This depiction clearly establishes the two main types of clothing ensembles which are characteristically communicated as *hare-gi* for the coming-of-age ceremony; kimono and suits. This narrative is also emphasised on a linguistic level which describes young adults as being dressed in 'gorgeous *furisode* kimono and brand-new suits' (*hanayakana furisode ya maatarashii sūtsu*, *Mainichi Shinbun* 9/1, p. 24).



Image 2: Photograph used in *Yomiuri Shinbun* 9/1, p. 29.

It is consequently not any kimono, but specifically a *furisode* kimono which is presented as part of the normative discourse here. The long-sleeved *furisode* is considered as *hare-gi*, ceremonial wear, and mainly reserved for unmarried women to wear at formal occasions (Dalby 2001: 172, Goldstein-Gidoni 1999, Milhaupt 2014: 38). The connection between *furisode* and girlhood comes out of this historical context with the garment mainly being worn by children of affluent families during the Edo period (Sawada 2006). Affluent families were conscious of making a distinction between adult and children's clothing during this time and therefore starting the practice of dressing their children in different types of garments of their own. The child's gender was also increasingly communicated through the garment's pattern design, with designs for young girls including flowers and birds, while those for young boys dominantly featured warrior motifs.

This connection continues to be sustained through contemporary kimono publications which narrate a *furisode* as the ideal garment for celebratory *kankonsōsai* occasions in a present-day context. In *Furisode Kinenbi*, for example, *furisode* kimono are linguistically described in the following ways: 'A *furisode* is a kimono with long sleeves, which is considered the most formal garment for unmarried women. It can be worn not just to the coming-of-age ceremony, but equally to formal occasions such as wedding ceremonies and the like' (*furisode*

*to wa sode no nagai kimono no koto wo ii, mikon josei no daiichi reisō desu. seijin-shiki dakedenaku, kekkonshiki nado no fōmaruna ba ni kiteiku koto ga dekimasu*, p. 95). Besides widening the potential places and occasions to wear a *furisode* to, the garment is also gendered as a garment exclusively worn by women. Through this narration, *furisode* kimono are often narrated as ‘the number one formal dress for unmarried women’ (*furisode wa mikon josei no daiichi reisō*, *Furisode Daisuki*, p. 24), linking the garment to a specific gender and also marital status.

Gender consequently plays a significant role in terms of categorising dress at the present-day coming-of-age celebration, with the two different dress styles being based on the two binary gender categories of male and female. Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni has applied theories of gender to her analysis of coming-of-age dress (1999). The scholar argues that the gender distinction within Japanese society is closely related to the differentiation made between ‘the West’ and ‘Japan’. The role of women within this setting is the maintenance of tradition and the household, while men are regarded as ‘models for action and rational enlightenment’ who represent modern, ‘Western’ ideas and thoughts (1999: 351). This binary distinction is symbolically and visually expressed in the difference of dress that are deemed appropriate for formal occasions, with men being encouraged to wear suits and women kimono.

The general gender distinction has long been part of the normative discourses circulated in Japan. Up until the seventh century, men and women generally wore very similar types of clothing (Dalby 2001: 27). This started to change during the Nara period, and particularly at the Imperial Court where dress practices became modelled on the styles favoured by the ruling class of the Chinese T’ang dynasty. From this time onwards, a clear distinction between the two genders, aided by an ideal of an ‘appropriate’ form of dress for each side, has been sustained. This binary gender distinction has occasionally been disrupted. During the Edo period, the ‘*wakashū*’ (literally ‘young person’), a young man with androgynous appearance and variable sexuality, was often depicted in artworks, prompting art historians Joshua S. Mostow and Asato Ikeda to refer to *wakashū* as a ‘third gender’ (2016). Nevertheless, it is difficult to assess how common the identification as *wakashū* really was, and consequently in how much influence this identity category had in destabilising existing gender norms.

In the context of contemporary Japanese society, the gender binary between men and women appears stable and set. Scholar Mami Banba illustrates that gender roles are clearly emphasised and communicated from a young age in an educational setting (2001: 92-93). This

includes the clear assignment of a gendered dress code. As part of their assigned school uniforms, boys generally wear trousers, while girls dress in skirts. The aim here is to strengthen the different spheres of *otoko-rashii* (the masculine) and *onna-rashii* (the feminine) through dress and expected conduct. Children marked as either 'female' or 'male' consequently need to learn to navigate a wide set of expectations and beliefs to be able to correctly perform their assigned gender role. Feminist scholar Judith Butler has identified gender as performative in this way (1999 [1990]). The scholar states that: '[...] gender proves to be performative - that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed' (1999 [1990]: 33). Butler argues that man and woman act in a way as if gender reflects an actual internal reality, and not a construction of society (Butler 2011). Gender is consequently produced and reproduced all the time through acting, speaking and behaving in certain ways (see also Entwistle 2015, Kaiser 2013, Kitamura 2017, Monden 2015, Reilly 2009a, Wilson 2003). Coming-of-age dress is assisting in the maintenance of binary gender categories and performances.

Another finding of the newspaper analysis is that a strong emphasis is placed on young women's coming-of-age dress. This is exemplified by the photography used throughout the articles, which all present a much bigger focus on the female participants and their dress. Of all fourteen images used in the articles, a total of eleven dominantly feature young women as the main subject (see image 3 for an example). Only one image in *Asahi Shinbun* depicts a more mixed crowd, but even here the female participants form the visual centre of the photograph, while the young men wearing suits are placed on the sides of the frame (image 4). Not a single photograph with a focus on male attendees was used throughout all newspapers, illustrating the representative function of young women and their dress.



Image 3: Photograph used in *Kyoto Shinbun*, 9/1, front page.



Image 4: Photograph used in *Asahi Shinbun*, 8/1, front page.

This focus is also strengthened through the textual elements of the articles, with the focus also linguistically placed on the dress of young women. *Furisode* are throughout the articles much more numerous mentioned than suits, for example. Within the first few paragraphs of one of the articles in *Asahi Shinbun*, the fact that figure skater Miyahara Satoko was donning a *furisode* kimono for her attendance of the ceremony in Kyoto is mentioned twice, detailed with the further remark that this was the figure skater's first time to wear this specific type of kimono in public (9/1, p. 19). Besides the frequency, it was also the amount of

detail which put the readers' attention mainly on *furisode* kimono rather than suits; while separate articles in *Yomiuri Shinbun*, *Mainichi Shinbun* and *Kyoto Shinbun* pointed out that Miyahara's *furisode* was coloured red, one article in *Yomiuri Shinbun* additionally identified the pattern as a flower design (9/1, p. 15).

Many scholars have identified the kimono industry as one of the main actors behind pushing the image of a young woman in a kimono as the ideal figure of a woman in the post-war period (Itō and Yajima 2016, Valk 2017, 2018) and, in this way, influencing the dress practice at the coming-of-age day. This is evident in contemporary *furisode* magazines and catalogues in which the coming-of-age day is often framed as the perfect day to wear a formal kimono. The coming-of-age of age day is narrated as 'a day to wear gorgeous *furisode*' (*hanayakana furisode wo mi ni matō hi*, *Furisode Kinenbi*, p. 12) and as the place where one makes their 'kimono debut' (*Furisode Perfect BOOK*, p. 21), for example. Indeed, the celebration often marks the first time a big part of the female Japanese population dresses up in a full kimono ensemble, with many of my interviewees stating that they had not worn a full kimono outfit prior to this occasion<sup>2</sup>. Many young women are certainly eager to make their 'kimono debut' on the day, resulting in the occurrence that around ninety-eight percent of female attendees' dress in a *furisode* ensemble for the coming-of-age ceremony (Itō and Yajima 2016: 15-16).

This dominance of *furisode* has not always been around, however. During the 1950s, while kimono was a popular dress choice for the female attendees of the coming-of-age ceremonies throughout the country, 'Western'-style clothes were equally regarded as a feasible option (Ishikawa 2001: 9-10). Both clothing types were regarded as valid options and were worn for the ceremony until quite recently. An informant of mine who attended the coming-of-age ceremony in the town of Setoda, Hiroshima prefecture, in 2000 reported that a significant number of young women did not dress in *furisode* kimono but rather opted for suits or even dresses (see image 5). The town of Setoda has a comparatively small population, so it could therefore be the case that there is a difference between rural and urban areas. Based on my own observation and accounts from my interviewees, only a small percentage of female attendees seem to dress in suits or dresses to the ceremony in the present-day context,

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<sup>2</sup> The first time besides being dressed in kimono for the annual celebration of *shichigosan*, at the age of three and five for boys, and seven for girls (Papp 2016). Individuals are generally too young to remember this occurrence however, which is planned and organised by their parents.

however; neither could I identify a single young woman in a suit or dress in Kyoto, nor did any of my interviewees, even the ones which attended ceremonies in more rural areas, recall seeing a young woman dressed this way. This does not mean that these types of garments have completely disappeared as options for women, but it can be concluded that the actual percentage of female participants wearing these forms of dress is likely very small.



Image 5: Young adults attending the coming-of-age ceremony in Setoda in 2000. Photograph used with the owner's permission.

*Furisode* are consequently dominating both the media representation and also actual dress practices of young women on the coming-of-age day. Itō and Yajima have argued that the garment has become a kind of uniform, and that, as a consequence, a young woman in a *furisode* has become the symbolic figure of the coming-of-age celebration (Itō and Yajima 2016: 16). My analysis confirms that national newspapers assist this process of framing a young woman in a *furisode* as representative of the coming-of-age celebration.

## Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the context of this study; the coming-of-age day in contemporary Japan. I have demonstrated how it is important to understand the coming-of-age day both as a national, as well as local celebration, with both aspects influencing the

execution of the regional ceremonies. I have also hinted towards existing tensions and contestations of meanings in regards to the coming-of-age day, as well as adulthood; while actors such as the ceremony organising committees and national newspapers might push a more conservatively idea, young adults themselves are also aiming to shape the meaning of adulthood, and with it their celebration of the coming-of-age, in their own terms. Some social commentators hence question the usefulness of the coming-of-age day. Others welcome the informal nature of the event, indicating that it opens up possibilities and creates greater inclusivity and diversity.

In terms of dress, a preliminary conclusion which can be drawn is that parts of the mainstream media and kimono industry actively sustain a normative ideal of dress for the coming-of-age celebration. A full *furisode* kimono ensemble is communicated as the normative type of clothing for female participants, and a suit, shirt and tie combination as the 'proper' form of dress for male participants. With diverging clothing choices not part of the visual, and also mainly linguistic discourse presented throughout the newspapers, a normative idea of the 'right' kind of dress for the coming-of-age ceremony is established and sustained. As Papp stated, objects which express core norms can emerge as symbols in the ritual. Referring to the *shichigosan* celebration, the scholar has argued that festive dress, and particularly kimono, 'is the most visible and important symbol of *shichigosan*' (2016: 186). This is also the case when it comes to the coming-of-age day where a young woman in a *furisode* kimono has become the most recognised symbol of the celebration.

## Chapter 2: Becoming *Yamato Nadeshiko*: The idealised image of a young woman in a *furisode* kimono

In the previous chapter, I have demonstrated how a *furisode*-clad young woman symbolically represents the coming-of-age celebration. This chapter will now further investigate this image.

An important force shaping the perception of a young woman in a *furisode* kimono is the kimono industry. The industry produces and distributes a vast range of promotional materials specifically focusing on *furisode* for the coming-of-age day. Many shops advertise their product range through catalogues which are produced in-house and distributed free of charge. Established publishing houses also release a variety of *furisode* magazines, many of which are produced in close collaboration with the industry (Tanabe personal interview 2018). *Furisode Kinenbi* (Shufu to Seikatsusha) and *Furisode Bijori* (Shinchosha Publishing) are examples of magazines whose main aim is to advertise coming-of-age *furisode* on an annual basis. Many young women's publications targeting an audience in their late teens and early twenties also promote different *furisode* styles by including specific photo series or by releasing annual coming-of-age special editions of the magazines. Online communication has also become immensely important in the last decades, with shops and brands using websites and social media accounts to further widen their outreach.

This chapter will examine these publications in detail, focusing its discussion on one of the *furisode* designs most often featured; the *koten* pattern design. I will analyse the discourses and narratives surrounding the style, arguing that the *koten* design is closely linked to the production of an idealised image of a young woman in a kimono.

### The Normative *Furisode* Design: The *koten* pattern

One of the main *furisode* kimono design advertised and produced for the coming-of-age day is labelled as '*koten*'. This specific style is embedded into a discourse of 'traditional Japanese' heritage and identity. *Koten* is defined by the Large Dictionary of Japanese Language as a phrase referring to 'ancient scripts, rites and ceremonies' (*Nihon Daijiten Kankōkai* 2002). Marking a kimono style as *koten* consequently creates a mental image of a design grounded in ancient Japanese tradition and thought. *Koten*-design *furisode* are introduced as garments which are 'created out of a delicate sense of beauty unique to Japan' (*nihon-nara de wa no sensaina biishiki no yotte umidasare*, *Furisode Bijori*, p. 10), representing the 'heart/soul' of

kimono (*kimono no kokoro*, or *kimono kokoro*). The word ‘*dentō*’, which can be translated as ‘tradition’ (*Nihon Daijiten Kankōkai* 2002), is a word often used in this context. Headlines such as ‘wrap yourself in beautiful Japanese tradition’ (*utsukushiki nihon no dentō ni tsutsumarete*, TAKAZEN catalogue, p. 39) demonstrate ideas of long-established practices and a profoundly valued cultural ancestry. The value and, in a way, sacredness of this imagined as ‘unchanging’ design is further strengthened through narratives of the *koten* style as ‘not influenced by trends’ (*ryūkō ni sayū sarenai koten-gara*, *Furisode Biyori*, p. 60). *Koten furisode* are in this way framed as the ‘true’ and original design, resulting in a narrative of the *koten* style as superior over other designs.

It is particularly the pattern design which is an important aspect in the creation and maintenance of this discourse. This significance is occasionally emphasised through a depiction of the garment not just as a form of clothing worn on the body, but also through the display on a kimono stand (see image 6). The exhibited *koten furisode* is in this way presented as a piece of art, with its pattern being in specific need of close inspection and appreciation. The use of phrases such as ‘orthodox *koten* pattern’ (*seitō-ha no koten monyō*, *Furisode Kinenbi*, p. 28) and ‘traditional Japanese pattern’ (*nihon dentō no koten-gara*, kimono hearts catalogue p. 2) further maintain the traditionalist discourse surrounding the *koten* style in this context.



Image 6: The column narrating the ‘beauty of tradition’ of kimono in *Furisode Biyori*, pp. 10-14.

An important feature of the pattern design is the specific placement of design elements which determines a kimono's level of ceremoniousness; while asymmetrical, continuous *eba-moyō* arrangements are regarded as ceremonial, pervasive and repetitive patterns called *komon* are generally considered less formal (Dalby 2001: 176, Ōkubo 2012, Zennihon Kimono Shinkō-kai 2018). This distinction is partly based on the resulting visual impression when the kimono is worn. The *eba-moyō* pattern creates an accumulation of a vast variety of different motifs on certain sections, such as the part below the obi and the left shoulder, for example, resulting in a visual impression of abundance and prosperity. This impression is different to the *komon* design whose pattern produces a more balanced imprint. *Koten* designs almost exclusively employ the *eba-moyō* pattern arrangement to communicate notions of ceremonialness and formality. Quotes such as 'suitable for the celebration of turning twenty' (*hatachi no demon ni fusawashiku*, Perfect BOOK p. 13) emphasise this arrangement's appropriateness for the coming-of-age day.

The individual design elements making up the *koten* pattern design are also immensely symbolic and aim to communicate a specific understanding of Japanese tradition and thought. The dominant use of specific plants as the main elements of *koten* designs can be linked to a specific cultural discourse which frames 'Japanese people' as immensely appreciative of nature. This discourse is deeply embedded into the consciousness of many Japanese citizens through annual, nation-wide events and performances such as the festivities surrounding the appearance of cherry blossoms (Ackermann 1997, Martinez 2005, Moeran and Skov 1997, Nakamaki 1995, Rear 2017, Saito 1985, Shirane 2011). The narratives surrounding kimono patterns have also helped to maintain this sentiment, with established authors reminding their readers to be aware of the season when it comes to choosing a kimono pattern design (Kimura 1997, 2010, Ōkubo 2012). Author Shimada Chiaki for example writes: 'It is advised to start wearing a specific flower pattern about one month ahead of the actual blossoming of the drawn flower, and to wear it until just before the flower blooms' (2017).

*Koten furisode* designs reference the seasonal period of the coming-of-age day through an employment of the types of plants and flowers which bloom in late winter and spring; camellia, plum and cherry blossoms, as well as peony, wisteria and narcissus appear most commonly on these patterns. These elements consequently provide the garments with a symbolic notion of a seasonal celebration of nature. The use of certain plant combinations as

part of the pattern, such as the pine, bamboo and plum blossom combination known as *saikan-sanyū* (literally ‘three friends of winter’) (Dusenbury and Bier 2004: 173) is a further testament to the discourse of seasonal appreciation and inherent awareness of ‘Japanese people’.

Another aspect which subtly communicates a specific understanding of Japanese tradition and heritage is the *koten* design’s reliance on motifs from Japanese mythology. Chrysanthemum flowers and cranes are examples of two motifs commonly incorporated into *koten* designs which symbolise the Japanese nation. Chrysanthemum flowers are regarded as the national symbol of Japan. They have long been imagined to be representing the sun goddess Amaterasu, the believed-to-be mythological ancestor of the ‘Japanese people’. Thus, chrysanthemum flowers form part of the official emblem of the Imperial House of Japan and are prominently placed on the cover of Japanese passports (Dalby 2001: 89, Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2019). Contemporary *koten* designs often feature chrysanthemum flowers and, in this way, provide the patterns with a slight nationalistic notion. The motif of the crane holds a similar position in Japanese culture and is believed to have been used as a decorative element since the Heian period (Bender 2013: 54, Dalby 2001: 310). Regarded as mythical creatures, cranes are appreciated for their nobility and elegance (Nitani 2013: 248). A specific pattern called *unkaku-mon* (the ‘crane flying through clouds’ pattern) combines representations of these birds with motifs of clouds, and has in contemporary times been reserved for robes of the Imperial family. The usage of the bird on contemporary *koten* designs consequently communicates a specific idea of ‘Japaneseness’ which is envisioned to be rooted in ancient beliefs and customs.

Other design elements employed on the *koten* pattern symbolise a sense of auspiciousness and blessing, which also strongly maintains the idea of traditional cultural ancestry. These symbols are most commonly representations of objects originating from customs associated with the imperial court of the Nara (710-794) and Heian period which was strongly influenced by the prevailing T’ang dynasty of China (Nitani 2017: 35, 286, Ōkubo 2012: 214). Ox-drawn carriages, a symbol of status and affluence (Nitani 2017: 286), as well as *takarazukushi* designs consisting of all kinds of treasures are examples of artistic motifs which are frequently incorporated into contemporary *koten* designs. Octagonal-shaped boxes containing a shell-matching game called *kaioke* are another example of the continued significance of the visual culture of the Heian period on contemporary patterns; the game gained popularity amongst young noblewomen in the tenth century and became an essential

bride's trousseau by the Edo period (Dusenberry 2004: 248, Jackson 2015: 168). The symbol is consequently associated with weddings, leading to an increased inclusion of the motif on kimono for young girls and women (Jackson 2015: 286). These visual motifs therefore further strengthen the narrative of the 'traditional Japaneseness' of the *koten* pattern.

The use of specific colours equally plays a significant role in the maintenance of the traditionalist discourse. Red is the colour predominantly used as part of *koten* designs. The shade of crimson, particularly when combined with white, symbolises good fortune and auspiciousness within Japanese culture (Hendry 1993: 16, Shirane 2011: 46). The use of the colour on *furisode* designs consequently emphasises the garment's appropriateness for a ceremonial and festive occasion. A sentiment of superiority over other colours is expressed in the common practice of publications to place a red *furisode* on the first page of a photo series. Phrases such as 'Speaking of *furisode*, [we imagine] red. Loved by everyone, red is the royal colour [of *furisode*]' (*furisode to ieba aka. donata kara mo kōkan wo motareru ōdō karā desu, Furisode Daisuki*, p. 12) communicate this sentiment in a verbal manner. This results in an imagination as crimson being the 'conventional colour of *furisode*' (*furisode no teiban no aka, Furisode Daisuki*, p. 56), bringing out the 'essence of Japan' (*wa no kokoro wo kanjiru aka, kimono hearts*, p. 4). It is particularly the combination of crimson with the above outlined floral designs which conveys a notion of excellence and superiority: 'A match made in heaven: classic red combined with a traditional floral pattern' (*teiban no aka to toradeishonaruna kahei no besuto konbi, Furisode Perfect BOOK*, p. 5). The *koten* pattern, often combining floral patterns with the colour red, is therefore imagined to be superior over other kimono designs.

Another narrative which is employed to communicate the excellence and authority of the *koten* pattern is the craftsmanship behind the design. This is exemplified in a column in *Furisode Biyori* which introduces 'traditional crafts and patterns' (*dentō no gihō to monyō*) to its readers (pp. 36-41, image 7). The introductory sentence reads: 'From techniques such as dyeing over embroidery to hand-drawn motif patterns, *furisode* are filled with traditional technique, beauty and best wishes' (*some ya shishū nado no gihō kara, kakareta moyō made furisode ni wa, dentō no waza to bi to kotohogi no omoi ga komerareteimasu*, p. 36). Different types of artisanal production methods, such as the two different embroidery techniques of *Sagara* and *Kanagoma* are introduced in this section. A focus is placed on the intricacy of the artisanal process behind them. The *Sagara* embroidery technique is described in the following way, for example: 'With an elegant finish holding a sense of unevenness, [*Sagara*] is considered

the supreme technique in kimono embroidery' (*Ōtotsu-kan no aru jōhinna shiagari de, kimono shishū no nakade wa saikōhō no gijutsu to sa rete imasu*, p. 36). The idea of skilful artisanal labour which is necessary in the production of *furisode* is consequently communicated and emphasised here. While *furisode* designs are mainly produced through much cheaper and efficient methods such as ink-jet printing in a present-day context (Hall 2020), the relation between contemporary *koten* designs and their original production methods is highlighted to foster admiration and appreciation for it.



Image 7: Column introducing 'traditional crafts and patterns' in *Furisode Biyori*, pp. 36-41.

Descriptions emphasising the long history of these craft traditions additionally frame the *koten* design as 'traditionally Japanese'. The pattern category of *Hiogi* is described as being worn by the families of the imperial court during the Heian period, for example (*Furisode Biyori*, p. 38). Descriptions like these narrate a link between a period in the distant past which is generally recognised and admired for the prominence of its imperial arts and crafts (see, for example, Dalby 2001, Hendry 2013, McCullough 1999) and types of patterns employed on contemporary *koten* designs. This narration of an unbroken and continuous connection therefore fosters a sentiment of preciousness and high value, aiming to communicate notions of esteemed cultural heritage and ancestry.

Another aspect strengthening this discourse of the superiority of the *koten* design relates to the artistic interpretation of the symbols and motifs as part of the pattern. On *koten* designs, a specific artistic interpretation which is reminiscent of the Japanese painting style termed *Yamato-e* is dominantly used. *Yamato-e* is believed to have originated in the Heian period and was often applied as a decorative element on furnishing; hanging scrolls and folding screens in Buddhist temples, as well as the residences of the upper class often featured items in this style (Mason 2004). Being decorative and ornamental in nature, its application evokes feelings of classiness and artistic mastery when used on contemporary *koten furisode* designs. The utilisation of specific pattern types, such as the six-sided tortoise-shell *kikkō*, interlocking circles of *shippō*, round waves *seigaiha* or paper stripes *noshi*, as well as patterns based on time-consuming dying technique of *kanoko shibori* and all strengthen this sentiment of refinement and high craftsmanship which are communicated through these patterns.

The *koten* design, through its different design elements and accompanying linguistic narrative, is consequently embedded in a discourse of ‘traditional Japaneseness’ based on an imagined long history of cultural ancestry and heritage. The design therefore creates and maintains a traditionalist idea of Japanese identity. This type of identity construction has attracted much scholarly attention, most prominently in the discourse of *nihonjinron*. *Nihonjinron*, literally ‘the theory of the Japanese people’, is a discourse which frames Japanese people as a homogenous race who possess a cultural purity, uniqueness and superiority due to their long, continuous history (Ivy 1995, Rear 2017, Surak 2013). It asserts Japanese people as being tied to one another through a strong group consciousness, with social obligations strongly valued and coherently followed (Rear 2017: 6). Hence, harmony and group affinity are imagined as being valued over individual forms of expression and thought.

The *nihonjinron* discourse first appeared during the Meiji Restoration in the mid-nineteenth century. Japan was constructed as a nation during this time, and the *nihonjinron* narrative assisted in the reimagination of the people as Japanese national subjects (Goldstein-Gidoni 1999, Oguma 2002). Prior to this development, Japan had witnessed a long period of political stability and peace. The reigning Tokugawa shogunate had enacted the policy of *sakoku* (literally ‘closed country’) in 1633, enforcing a segregation of Japan towards the outside world (Hendry 2013, Nenzi 2008, Tipton 2015). This meant that for over 220 years, only very limited and always regulated contact with foreign subjects occurred which limited the general exchange of goods and ideas. This period of isolation ended in 1853 when Commodore

Matthew C. Perry, who was sent by American president Millard Fillmore, arrived with his black ships in front of the harbour of Uraga and demanded the opening of the ports of Japan to foreign trade and shelter (Saeki 2005, Dower 1999). Japan, which had not engaged in any militant enterprises over the last 220 years, lacked sufficient forces to repulse these demands (Banno 2014). The shogunate therefore gave in, signing the Convention of Kanagawa, or the Japan–U.S. Treaty of Peace and Amity, on 31 March 1854. The following years were marked by a civil war between the traditionalist and modernist factions of the country. The modernist faction emerged victoriously and placed the forward-looking and western-welcoming Emperor Mutsuhito on the Chrysanthemum Throne in 1868. In an attempt to position Japan as equal to the Anglo-American forces, the government embraced Japan’s quest for modernisation and industrialisation by reforming the educational and governmental system of the country (Hendry 2013). A market-driven economy as well as many newly developed technological advancements and systems were equally implemented within a couple of years.

This was the time when a discourse of the Japanese nation and Japanese national subjects started to appear (Gordon 2012, Rear 2017: 7). Before this time, a sense of national unity was not that strongly established, with individuals identifying themselves more dominantly as members of feudal domains and villages (Oguma 2002). The appearance of a ‘Western Other’ somewhat shifted the focus of dominant identity construction from a rural to a national level, however (Ivy 1995: 4). The re-imagination of objects and practices as either possessing a Japanese origin, linguistically indicated by *wa*, or of Western origin, linguistically indicated by *yō*, was an important part of this new national discourse (Gordon 2012). This dichotomic differentiation was applied to clothing for instance, and Japanese clothing were from then on titled *wafuku*, literally ‘Japanese dress’ while non-Japanese clothing were referred to as *yōfuku*, ‘Western dress’. In the Arts, the new categorisation of *yamato-e*, the previously discussed ‘traditional Japanese’ style, was in a similar way born out of the attempt to order and homogenise different artistic traditions and approaches into a single discourse of a ‘truly Japanese’ painting style (Yang 2018).

This is also the time when the term kimono, derived from the word *kirumono*, literally ‘a thing to wear’, started to be used more frequently (Milhaupt 2014: 21). Before this time period, individual garments were differentiated in greater detail, and called by their allocated name (Dalby 2001: 59-65, Milhaupt 56-96). During the Meiji period, this differentiation slowly disappeared, however, and all garments became categorised under the label ‘kimono’. As with

other cultural objects, kimono was increasingly attached to the discourse of a unique Japanese identity and heritage.

While these nationalistic sentiments were somewhat dampened when the Japanese nation officially admitted defeat after the detonation of the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II, the post-war 'economic miracle' of Japan fuelled a re-emergence of the *nihonjinron* discourse (Hendry 2013: 17-18). Under the backdrop of Japan becoming the world's second largest economy by the 1960s, with economic growth lasting until the late 1980s, politicians, business leaders and academics emphasised and promoted Japan's unique characteristics and attributes against the 'Western Other', now dominantly assessed to be the United States of America (Ivy 1995, Yoshino 1992). The relationship and general attitude towards the 'Western Other' was not singular however, with different demographics, and even single individuals, following different sentiments ranging from awe and respect to feelings of superiority over the United States (Gordon 2012).

As an increasing import of commercial goods manufactured in the United States entered the Japanese market in the post-war decades, many young people living in urban areas embraced a new 'American' lifestyle, rejecting the nationalist sentiments of the Japanese empire (van Asche 2000). *Wafuku* lost their appeal towards the younger generation and, hence, largely abandoned by the majority of the population (Hendry 2013: 17). With variations and distinctions of *wafuku* becoming forgotten, the singular idea of *the* kimono as the native garment of Japan was once again strengthened (Dalby 2001: 64). This ambivalent attitude, as well as the ongoing modernisation and urbanisation process, produced a discourse of anxiety over the loss and disappearance of Japanese traditions and customs in return (Gordon 2012: 82, Ivy 1995). Cultural commentators have since aimed to revive the *nihonjinron* discourse.

One of the ways in which the *nihonjinron* discourse reappeared is exemplified in Japan Railway's successful 'Discover Japan' domestic tourism campaign which launched in the 1970s. Marilyn Ivy has discussed how the campaign utilised the notions of *kokoro* to create an image of a rural, remote, non-American, and non-rational Japan which could be (re-)located by Japanese citizens: 'Discover Japan was the first highly visible, mass campaign urging Japanese to discover what remained of the premodern past in the midst of its loss [...] The phrase took on a resonance far exceeding its pragmatic function as a publicity slogan for the national railways, as it came to symbolise a generation's desire to escape to its origin' (1995: 34). The 'true Japanese' identity is narrated through the advertising campaign as one that is on the

verge of being forgotten, but which Japanese people desire to (re-)discover. Similarly, Anthropologist Christine R. Yano has demonstrated how the musical genre of *enka*, which is being promoted as the epitomisation of the *nihonjin no kokoro*, the heart and soul of the Japanese, emphasises a very similar sentiment of national longing during this time (2002). Approached from this perspective, the specific narration of the *koten* style as the *kokoro* of kimono which I introduced earlier evokes similar images of longing and nostalgia for the 'true Japanese' identity. Just like travelling to rural and remote places advertised in the 'Discover Japan' campaign, the discourse surrounding *koten furisode* similarly encourages consumers to 'temporarily recover [the] lost [Japanese] self' (Ivy 1995: 42) by wearing a *koten*-style *furisode* for the coming-of-age day. The magazines and publications therefore reproduce narratives of the *nihonjinron* discourse to frame the *koten* design as the 'traditional Japanese' *furisode* style in a contemporary setting in this way.

#### Canonisation of Knowledge and Practice: The standardised *kitsuke* and the role of the kimono expert

After discussing the pattern designs of kimono, and how specific elements are used to create an idea of traditional and refined 'Japaneseness', this section will focus on the *kitsuke* to discuss the role of the kimono expert. As mentioned earlier, kimono are flat garments which are adjusted to the wearer's body through the dressing process called *kitsuke*. The *kitsuke*, which is closely tied to the resulting fit of a kimono, is of immense importance. Liza Dalby states that: '[a] kimono and obi outfit [...] receives its ultimate judgement by the way it is worn' (2001, 206), while textile entrepreneur Yamaguchi Genbei concludes that '[...] seventy percent of what makes a kimono a kimono is how it is worn' (2021).

*Furisode* publications follow set conventions when it comes to the *kitsuke* and resulting fit. *Furisode* presented in the magazines and catalogues are, for example, without exception always draped from the left side over to the right, resulting in a fixed position of the garment's side-hem and collar. This custom is believed to be based on the fashions of the Imperial T'ang dynasty which were imported to the Japanese court in the eight century (Dalby 2001: 27-28). The Yōrō Clothing Code which was implemented in 718 stated that all robes, in Chinese fashion, should be fitted with the left side over the right. This specific style was employed by members of the imperial household to communicate ideas of decency and civility, and, hence, to distinguish themselves from the 'barbarism' and indecency of the lower classes who did not

follow a set convention in relation to dress. While the origins of the left-over-right rule can be located here, draping the garment the opposite way is now associated with death and the afterlife<sup>3</sup> (Dalby 2001: 170, Suzuki 2004). It is consequently interpreted as a bad omen to do so. Neither of the two outlined aspects are within the publications explicitly mentioned as the reason for the rule, however. Nevertheless, through its repeated application of this convention, the idea that this rule is part of the general ‘common knowledge’ surrounding kimono is strengthened.

Within the publications, the dominant fit of most *furisode* on the models also follows set conventions and therefore conveys a standardisation of rules and regulations (see images 8 and 9 as examples). The emphasis here is on straightness and alignment; the lower part of the kimono is wrapped around the body to resemble a long tube in the form of a pencil skirt, continuing in a straight manner all the way from the *obi* sash down to the hem of the kimono. The seam of the kimono is set in a horizontally straight position and always ends just above the models’ feet. The way in which the *obi* sash is placed onto the torso additionally plays a significant role in the creation of a straight silhouette by visually extending, rather than breaking, the vertically straight contour of the overall outline of the kimono ensemble. An additional aspect which further emphasises the straight and aligned character is the smooth surface of the kimono, with no wrinkles or creases visible in its outer layer. These stylistic elements consequently convey an idea of neatness and rigour, as well as decency and formality.

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<sup>3</sup> This belief stems from the custom called *sakasa goto* which is performed during Buddhist funerals (Suzuki 2004: 232). This custom commands that all practices are performed in the reverse order when preparing the dead for their departure from this world. In line with this custom, the *kyō-katabira*, the white gown the deceased is dressed in, is placed so that the right side of the collar overlaps the left.



と赤と深緑の組み  
雲錦気の振袖。多  
彩りばめた小付の  
身長を選びませ  
れば。  
10,000円(税別)  
セクショナリ  
レンタル価格は  
お安くございます。  
フリスode 加盟店

Image 8 on left: Image from *Furisode Bijori*, p. 22.



美人度の高い王道コーデで  
憧れの女性らしさを手に入れよう

振袖 No.R-5801  
素材: 正絹  
¥599,000(税別)  
振袖の王道コーデで、憧れの女性らしさを手に入れよう。この振袖は、赤と白のコントラストが美しい。大判の桜や梅の花が、優雅な印象を与えます。お祝いや特別な日には、ぜひ着用してください。

Image 9 on right: Image used in *Furisode Perfect BOOK*, p. 5.

The fitting and positioning of the obi similarly follows established rules and conventions. The obi is dominantly tied in an elaborate manner, with the knot facing the wearer’s back. It is exclusively wide sashes which are used as part of all *furisode* ensembles throughout the publications. These *fukuro* or *nagoya obi* are characterised by a width of approximately thirty centimetres, and are in general recommended for festive and formal occasions by kimono experts (see, for example, Kimura 2010, Ōkubo 2012, Zennihon Kimono Shinkō-kai 2018). The only other official obi variations, the *hanhaba obi* (literally ‘half-width obi’) or variation of the *hitoe obi* with a width of around fifteen centimetres is considered less formal and therefore deemed as appropriate for casual events (Yamanaka 1982: 70, Ōkubo 2012: 25). It comes therefore as no surprise that only *fukuro* or *nagoya obi* make an appearance in the *furisode* publications. Other conventions rigorously followed are the *obi-jime’*a (obi belt) placement in the middle of the obi, and the addition of an *obi-age* (obi cloth) to complete the ensemble. The convention of the creation of an *ohashori*, the fold of fabric beneath the obi, is also preserved throughout the publications. Throughout the *furisode* magazines and catalogues, there are

consequently no attempts to challenge these conventions which are coherently conformed to.

While this style and the underlying dressing process is communicated as the 'standard' through its repetitive application throughout all publications, it is based on a specific style of wearing kimono. This style has been dubbed the 'samurai-turned-bourgeois' style by kimono scholar Liza Dalby (2001: 112). Although previously being subject to fashion and outside influences, a certain kimono shape became 'frozen in time' during the Meiji period (1868-1912) when kimono was re-imagined as Japan's national costume. This led to the standardisation and formalisation of the style favoured by the ruling samurai class of Edo Japan, resulting in the above discussed notion of an 'unchanged tradition'. Japanese studies scholar Stephanie Assmann has consequently argued that this type of kimono can be regarded as an invented tradition following Hobsbawm and Rangers conceptualisation introduced in chapter one (2008: 360-361); the practices surrounding kimono have become governed by rules and regulations, aiming to impose the idea of 'Japan's national costume' onto the garment. The ruling class of the Meiji period aimed to establish the Japanese nation, with the construction of a national garment being of profound relevance to this cause. As a consequence, this kimono 'with a capital K' is, according to Dalby, 'intolerant of variation and inimitable to experiment' (2001: 114). Strict rules and regulations govern what is and what is not acceptable when it comes to the dressing process and the final fit. This led to a certain tension and unease in relation to wearing kimono, which is fuelled by an anxiety over overstepping certain boundaries and disregarding rules and conventions (Assmann 2008, Itō and Yajima 2016).

This notion is further strengthened through special sections throughout the publications which provide readers with detailed instructions on draping and fitting the coming-of-age *furisode*. While slightly rarer in catalogues, all *furisode* magazines dedicated a significant number of pages to these *kitsuke* columns. These columns feature a detailed account in both textual and visual form on the basic steps of dressing in a full *furisode* ensemble from putting on the *nagajuban* (under-kimono) to the final tying of the obi knot (see image 10). They introduce all items needed for the proper observance of this process, introducing additional props such as towels and hip pads which are needed to 'correct' the body's natural curves and bumps to create a flat surface to wrap the kimono around. These instructions and guidelines are introduced in a similar manner in all *furisode* publications, and are in this way communicated as fixed and non-negotiable. The importance of these sections is further emphasised on a textual level: 'To a beautiful appearance in furisode, preparation and

following the right dressing process are key' (*furisode wo kita sugata wo utsukushiku suru ni wa, junbi to tadashi kitsuke ga pointo ni narimasu*, *Furisode Daisuki*, p. 82). Readers are in this way made aware of the significance of the 'proper' way of dressing when it comes to coming-of-age *furisode*.



Image 10: Some pages of the *kitsuke* column in *Furisode Kinenbi*, pp. 97-98.

An important figure sustaining these discourses are experts who play a significant role in the standardisation discourse surrounding coming-of-age *furisode*. Within the *furisode* publications, kimono experts usually appear as part of the *kitsuke* columns. A closer look at these columns reveal certain attitudes relating to the different roles of the dresser and the dressed. In *Furisode Daisuki*, the kimono expert Yasuda Takako is in charge of providing advice and guidance on twenty-nine pages dedicated to *furisode* dressing and obi binding, as well as manners and etiquette (pp. 61 - 90). On the first page, Yasuda is briefly introduced with a photographic image showing herself dressed in a plain brown kimono (see image 11). Her status as an expert and figure of authority is legitimised by the accompanying texts which lists the dresser's official titles and affiliations with prestigious kimono institutions. Yasuda is consequently framed as an expert who possesses a significant amount of knowledge on

kimono, and therefore presented as someone whose advice should be respected and adhered to.

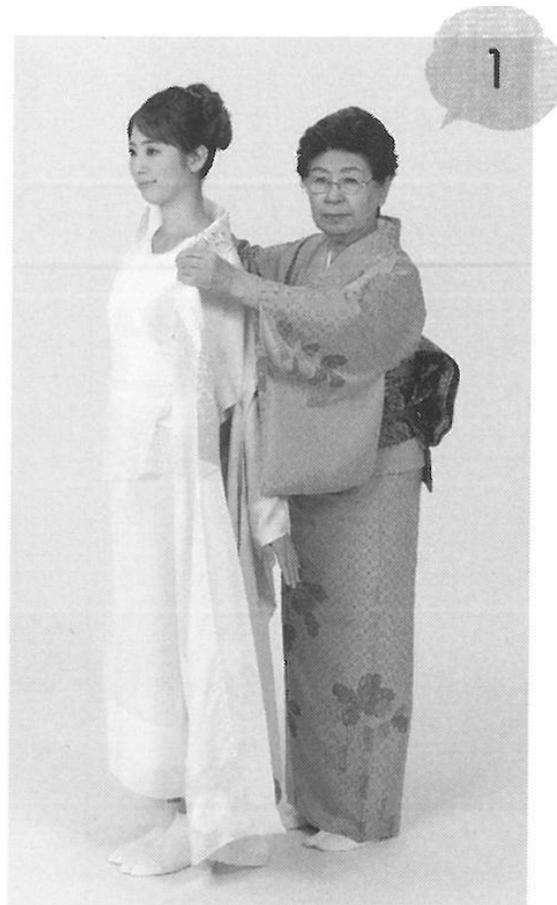


Image 11: *Kitsuke* instructor Yasuda Takako who is framed as a kimono expert, *Furisode Daisuki*, p. 61.

Image 12: The first image used in the step-by-step *kitsuke* guide, *Furisode Daisuki*, p. 83.

While Yasuda is positioned as an expert, the readers on the other hand are inversely placed in the position of the novice who is in need of advice and guidance. This dichotomic relationship is strengthened through the images used in the *kitsuke* section which depict the step-by-step process of Yasuda putting a *furisode* on a female model (see image 12). Within these images, Yasuda is depicted as active and in charge; the postures taken by the expert represent someone who is involved in the active process of dressing the model in the garment. The model on the other hand is depicted in a passive and seemingly lifeless manner of a person who is not involved in the dressing process at all. The model gives off the impression of possessing no agency, while Yasuda is the expert who is represented as being in command. These images consequently manifest an idea of the kimono expert as the person who is in

control, and the reader, or person being dressed, as the passive observer. This positioning therefore leads to a hierarchical relationship and order of experts and non-experts, of kimono professionals and novices. The *kitsuke* columns consequently demonstrates that different individuals are provided with different levels of authority and power to influence the discourse surrounding kimono.

This relationship between kimono expert and novice has been sustained throughout the post-war context. The 1970s saw an increase in literature on kimono which aimed to educate the general public on the correct way of wearing kimono (Dalby 2001: 114-121). This resulted in a canonisation of kimono knowledge by kimono. One of the authors establishing herself during this time was Shiotsuki Yaeko. Being active as an author since the 1970s onwards, Shiotsuki was and still is considered as one of Japan's leading authorial figures and expert in regards to etiquette and manners, not just in relation to kimono but also on a general basis (Ackermann 2016: 6-7, Cang 2015: 128, 130, Itō and Yaejima 2016: 88-90). One of her first books on the topic, *Kankonsōsai Nyūmon* (Introduction to Ceremonial Occasions, 1970), quickly established itself as a bestseller for instance, leading Shiotsuki to publish more than one hundred books through the course of her life. Her authorial status mainly derives from her social positioning of being the firstborn child of the main family which leads the Urasenke school of *sadō* (tea ceremony). The leaders of the school claim to be direct descendants of the legendary tea master Sen no Rikyū (1522-1591) who is believed to have established the ceremonial preparation and presentation of tea in the first place (Handa 2015). Shiotsuki, who is well acquainted with formalisation of cultural practices applied this practice to kimono and, in 1972, published *Kimono no Hon* (The Book of Kimono). The book contains a total of 390 rules in regards to buying, choosing, and wearing kimono.

Authors such as Kimura Taka and Ōkubo Nobuko have similarly strengthened the canonisation of kimono knowledge and practices by establishing themselves as experts on kimono's conventional practice (*shikitari*). They consequently serve as advisory figures on topics such as *kitsuke*, manners and etiquette, as well as the garment's beauty and elegance. Similar to Shiotsuki, both women started their careers in the late 1960s, aiming to affirm kimono's position as, in Kimura's words, a 'national costume that expresses Japanese aesthetics' (*kimono wa, nihon no biishiki wo hyōgen suru minzoku ishō de aru*, 1997). Kimura published a wide range of advisory books from the 1970s to the mid-2010s (see, for example, 1980, 1997, 1999, 2010). She particularly defended and sustained the idea of the expression

of a seasonal sensibility through conventionally established colour choices for kimono through most of her books. Ōkubo on the other hand, who has been active ever since becoming a *kitsuke* instructor in the 1970s, works as a styling and dressing advisor for kimono magazines and television programmes, as well as kimono corporations (Haregi no Marusho website 2020). Her publications primarily contain a strong educational undertone, advising the readers on topics such as suitability and appropriateness of kimono materials, colours, patterns and obi (see, for example, 2012, 2013, 2017). Ōkubo's writing is additionally underlined by a strong nationalistic sentiment. This is expressed in the foreword to the 2012 published work *Kimono no Jiten*: 'Kimono is born out of Japan's long history and traditions, and is thought of as the pinnacle of rationality and above all, beauty' (*kimono wa nihon no nagai rekishi to dentō no naka kara umareta, gōri-teki katsu utsukushi-sa no kyokuchi tomo omowareru ishō de aru*, 2012: 2). A wide variety of educational publications aiming to teach individuals the 'correct' approach towards kimono consequently exists in contemporary Japan.

It has been argued that Japanese citizens possess a high degree of awareness when it comes to etiquette and formal events (Papp 2016: 2). *Reigi sahō*, etiquette and courtesy, plays a very important role in Japanese society. While this importance can be observed on a global scale, scholars have argued that in Japan, it is the explicit nature which is emphasised and expressed through a wide range of published material. Minako Saito has illustrated that it was particularly the twentieth century which witnessed a massive increase in the compilation of prescriptive, normative texts aimed for the general public (2006: 214-222). In the 1920s, handbooks such as Homori Kingo's *Kekkon no Shiori* (A Guide to Marriage, 1927) and Kodaira Kyuma's *Nihon Konrei-shiki* (Wedding Ceremonies in Japan, 1929) became bestsellers, with the authors offering detailed guidance on various aspects of holding and participating in wedding ceremonies (Ackermann 2016: 5, Saito 2006: 28-29). In contemporary times, a vast variety of manuals and guidebooks, as well as websites and personal blogs continue to offer advice on how to correctly perform formal events and rituals (Ackermann 2016: 1). These materials can be classified as conservative, and are therefore particularly appealing to a demographic audience which possesses a traditionalist mindset (Ackermann 2016: 1, 19). Surak has argued that the importance of being a 'good Japanese' is often emphasised through these type of publications: '[w]hat is at stake [in Japan] is less whether someone is Japanese, a question that nearly always allows for a clear and automatic yes or no answer, but what kind of Japanese that person is' (2013: 10). It can consequently be regarded as valuable for individuals to

demonstrate characteristics of a 'good' Japanese citizen and turn to *reigi sahō* publications to guide their performance at ritualistic occasions. The texts created by kimono experts follow similar sentiments and advise young women on how to correctly perform their coming-of-age.

One of the type of institutions further sustaining the standardised and normative kimono discourse are kimono academies. These institutions started to operate all over Japan in the post-war period (Dalby 2001: 119-121, Goldstein-Gidoni 1999: 352). One of these academies examined by Japanese studies scholar Stephanie Assmann is Sōdō Reihō Kimono Gakuin (2008). The institution started operating in 1964 and currently manages five academies which operate in the biggest cities throughout Japan (Sōdō Reihō Kimono Gakuin website). The organisation's founder, Yamanaka Norio, established himself as a kimono expert through publications in a very similar fashion to Kimura, Ōkubo and Yaeko, publishing both Japanese and English language manuals on kimono etiquette and conduct since the 1960s (Assmann 2008: 367-368). At the academy, students are trained based on their level of expertise, from classes being offered for beginners, advanced and professional learners. Students can choose between courses to learn *kitsuke*, as well as sessions focusing on kimono manners and etiquette. The school recommends taking these courses in a complementary manner to obtain the full training needed to wear kimono in an appropriate manner. Besides kimono related courses, the academy also offers classes in calligraphy, *haiku* poetry, and sewing.

Kimono academies like Sōdō Reihō Kimono Gakuin do not straightforwardly teach practical ways and skills to dress in kimono; they have turned the knowledge and dressing process surrounding the garment into a discipline. This whole 'way of practice' is linguistically indicated by the character *dō* which can loosely be translated as 'way' or 'path'. The *sōdō* in Sōdō Reihō Kimono Gakuin refers to this approach, with *sōdō* literally being a 'way of dressing' for instance (Assmann 2008: 367). In Japan, many practices have been turned into disciplines in this way, often based on a philosophical approach towards a skill which is learnt through repetitive practice and conduct (Linhart 1995, Surak 2013). Tea ceremony (*sadō*), flower arrangement (*ikebana*), *noh* theatre and martial arts are all examples of practices which have been turned into such disciplines. Illustrated by the formalisation process of *ken*, a game popular as part of the amusement quarters culture of the Edo period, Sepp Linhart has illustrated how the process involves standardisation of the rules and conduct surrounding the practice (1995). Linhart argues that the change from a casual activity to a form of *dō* has commonly occurred when 'some overeager proponents try to raise the status of their beloved

activity, giving them a (pseudo-)philosophical base and a (pseudo-)religious aura' (1995: 38). As part of this process, activities become ritualised, with guidelines and principles set in place to regulate and govern its execution. In the case of *ikebana* for instance, the blossoms and stems of flowers are arranged according to strict rules based on aesthetic guidelines set by the leaders, not simply on personal preference or aesthetic value of the maker (Surak 2013, 37).

Many contemporary kimono academies continue to operate in a similar manner. Dalby has stated that '[students of the kimono academies] aspire to wear kimono in a high-class way, and the academies respond to this desire by positioning themselves precisely as possessing the authority to dictate the way' (2001: 120). The 'high-class way' of wearing a kimono has been standardised and canonised by experts and academies who are now guardians of this knowledge and its transmission. The relationship between experts and learners is clearly defined and sustained through practices such as issuing certificates after the completion of certain courses. *Furisode* publications play an important part in the sustainment of this relationship through active collaborations with established kimono dressing schools. *Furisode Daisuki* collaborates exclusively with famous *kitsuke* academy Sō-ga Kimono Gakuin (opened in 1978) which is headed by the earlier mentioned kimono expert Yasuda Takako, for example. In *Furisode Biyori*, the dressing and fitting process is supervised by Endō Saeko, a teacher at *kitsuke* academy Hakubi Kyōto Kimono Gakuin (opened in 1971), while in the *Furisode Perfect BOOK*, all presented *furisode* ensembles are put together by students of Yubi Kimono Gakuin under the supervision of the school's representative Kashima Yuko. These individuals consequently ensure that the established conventions and rules surrounding the coming-of-age kimono continue to be regarded as 'the norm', while at the same time strengthening their own disciplinarian status and power through collaborations with the publications.

### Becoming Yamato Nadeshiko through self-presentation and conduct

Kimono experts and academies not only inform narratives surrounding the kimono's *kitsuke*, but additionally influence notions of the 'correct' bodily movement and conduct. This aspect is exemplified through the positions taken by models within the *furisode* publications. The torsos of the young women are dominantly settled in a straight and upright position, with legs and feet placed neatly next to each other. This rigid position conveys a sense of formality and etiquette by emphasising the *furisode's* straight and firm fit. The posture might seem slightly unnatural and consequently evoke feelings of uptightness and stiffness, however. This

notion is commonly countered by a display of sophistication and delicacy through the positioning of the model's arm and hands; a feminine and refined character is conveyed through the conscious use of the fingers, expressing grace and dignity through their subtle placement in different positions. The models' heads are often facing away from the camera, glaring gracefully in the distance or smiling at an occurrence invisible to the viewer, or, alternatively, smile joyously directly into the camera. The facial expression is usually not overtly expressive, however, but often slightly contained and reserved. All of these aspects translate into a position of momentary stillness, resulting in an impression of the model posing for a photograph which is taken of her. It is of course not any photograph however, but a picture-perfect representation of a cultivated young woman in a ceremonial costume.

This presentation demonstrates that the *koten* design is linked to a specific perception of a young woman as refined and dignified. It is consequently not just simply the choice of the design of the *furisode*, but additionally one's manners and personal conduct which are of great importance. Personal conduct can be regarded as a 'form' which is conceptualised as *kata* in Japan (Dunn 2018). The concept references the 'proper' way to move and conduct oneself. In the tea ceremony, for example, the *kata* when preparing tea is referred to as *temae*, with conductors aiming for beauty and refinement through their bodily movements and manners (Surak 2013: 93). Sociologist Eiko Ikegami has demonstrated how *kata* is an immensely important concept within Japanese culture, with schools of etiquette teaching stylised movements of everyday activities such as bowing, eating certain dishes, and opening doors (2005: 332-342). With a big emphasis placed on the aesthetic form of etiquette, bodily conduct is in this way framed as a performing art. This disciplining of the body starts at an early age and is sustained by the educational system in Japan. Scholar Matthew J. Burdelski has studied pre-school graduation ceremonies, one of the occasions through which pupils are made familiar with the expected *kata* (2020). Through specific role-playing activities which consist of verbal and bodily guidance, elementary school children learn how to walk, bow and receive a certificate in an appropriate manner. Teachers use touch to correct a child's bodily conduct, emphasising the importance of aesthetic movements in ritualistic contexts.

*Furisode* publications similarly include manner and etiquette sections which aim to teach the correct kimono *kata* to the readers. Through illustrations and short texts, they commonly cover basic codes of conduct when dressed in kimono. Guidance is offered on aspects such as how to appropriately move one's body when walking and sitting down, as well

as when climbing up and down stairs. Graceful manners of getting in and out of a car, as well as how to behave during a meal and how to use the bathroom are equally covered. Some sections additionally include recommendations for how to look charming in a photograph, with specific advice on how to position one's head, hands and feet. The *Furisode Perfect BOOK* encourages its readers to 'remember the appropriate movements and basic etiquette, [and] aim to become a refined *furisode* beauty!' (*fusawashī mi no konashi ya kihon manā o oboete, mezase, shitoyakana furisode bijin*, p. 48). *Koten* designs are promised to bring about a 'cultivated and refined feminine aura' (*okuyukashī josei no funiki, Furisode Perfect BOOK*, p. 8) compatible with a 'neat and tender way of wearing' (*seisode yasashiku kikonasu*, kimono hearts catalogue, p. 2) in this way. A certain idea of a female *kata* is expressed here which relates to notions of refinement, sensitivity and courtesy. Wearing a *furisode* therefore encourages constant monitoring and correcting of one's body, with young women being reminded to adjust their movements to the communicated norms.

It is not just one's conduct, and movement however, but the whole procedure of preparing and making up one's body which is narrated as significant in this regard: 'To amplify the magnificence of this celebratory day, thoroughly look for a hairstyle and make-up which suit yourself and match your kimono perfectly' (*kinen no hi wo subarashī ichinichi ni suru tame ni, heameiku mo jikkuri to jibun to furisode ni pittari no mono wo sagashite kudasai, Furisode Kinenbi*, p. 31). For some attendees, preparation for the ceremony includes a lengthy grooming procedure, with appointments at hair and beauty salons secured to make up one's body (Goldstein-Gidoni 1999). Some attendees take this so seriously that they book their appointments up to a year in advance. Others do their hair and make-up on their own, with family and friends assisting them in the process (personal interviews 2018). The idea of following opulent dress practices is linked to the sentiment of creating long-lasting memories. This is narrated in *Furisode Hime* in the following way: 'Because I want to create lots of memories, let's go out being dressed up to the fullest' (*omoide mo ippai nokoshitai kara, meippai omekashi shite dekakemashou*, p. 4). The body is consequently rigorously prepared to result in an appearance which is worth remembering for years to come.

This significance is also strengthened through the overall styling of the models. The make-up of the models is kept simple, resulting in a very natural look with only a subtle highlight on the lips. The hair styling is dominated by elegant updos, with the hair pulled back and styled in a professional, but natural rather than artificial looking manner. Flowery hair

accessories are commonly used which match the *furisode* or obi in colour and motif. The nails are manicured in a seemingly natural manner, using see-through and neutral coloured nail polish, such as light nude and rose tones, to not distract but rather underline the overall pure and feminine impression of the models. Readers are further encouraged to select colour and patterns of furisode in accordance with personal characteristics of their bodies such as colour of skin and hair, as well as height (*shinchō ya hada-iro, kami-iro ni yotte niau iro ya gara mo kawarimasu, Furisode Biyori*, p. 22). The choice of the right garment and dress items is consequently not necessarily based on one's personal taste and preference, but rather on the question of what would bring out a pleasant and agreeable outer appearance.

This notion of creating a favourable impression is additionally strengthened through the linguistic narration of the *koten* style within the publications. Expressions such as '[making a] favourable impression' (*kōkan*) and 'being praised' (*homerareru*) are frequently used in this context. The *koten* design is described as 'an elegant style beloved by all generations' (*dono sedai kara mo aisareru ereganto sutairu*, p. 7) in *Furisode Kinenbi*, and tied to the promise of the wearer 'becom[ing] a 'good girl' who is liked by everyone' (*dentō-ha no yosōi de, dare kara mo sukareru guddo gāru ni narechaimasu, Furisode Perfect BOOK*, p. 36). The sentiment of appropriateness of this specific design for ceremonial occasions is also emphasised as illustrated by this quote from *Furisode Daisuki*: '[The *koten* pattern is] a superior *furisode* design appropriate for a formal occasion' (*hare no hi no fusawashī furisode no ōdō dezain*, p. 58), as well as the following quote from *Furisode Biyori*: '[The design] brings out a cute gorgeousness appropriate to celebrate a new chapter in one's life' (*jinsei no shutsumon wo iwau ni fusawashī kyūtona hanayakasa wo enshutsu dekimasu*, p. 60).

Specific training aimed to cultivate a certain type of beauty has for a long time been advocated as part of the general education for girls in Japan. Educator Atomi Kakei who founded the first girls' schools in Japan in the nineteenth century included manner and etiquette training into the curriculum (Surak 2012: 77). The educator included tea ceremonies as a means to cultivate the desired virtues and *kata*. Many girls' schools followed suit and incorporated the tea ceremony as a mandatory, as well as extracurricular activity from the 1880s onwards. While not being taught as part of the official curriculum anymore, the tea ceremony still makes an occasional appearance in official education. As part of the *Ibashozukuri* Programme, a government initiative which ran from 2004 to 2007, tea ceremony demonstrations were conducted at middle schools throughout Japan, for example (Surak 2013:

149, 220-221). Pupils were divided into two groups based on their gender. This division strongly influencing the overall framing of the tea ceremony demonstration. While the presentation for boys mainly aimed to portray a connection between the tea ceremony and the 'Japanese spirit', the presentation for girls heavily emphasised the practice of the tea ceremony as a way to cultivate femininity through training in proper manners and conduct (Surak 2013: 149-151). Bodily comportment and discipline were demonstrated as particularly important aspects in this regard, with girls being shown in great detail how to correct bow, as well as how to move when dressed in kimono. Differentiation between 'good' conduct and 'bad' conduct were emphasised through bodily presentations of teachers contrasting the movement of elegant woman with those of ungainly and clumsy individuals. This teaching approach emphasises the type of elegance, dignity and grace expected from 'good' Japanese women.

This type of agreeable and pleasant women is in some *furisode* publications framed as 'Yamato Nadeshiko'. *Yamato Nadeshiko* is a concept which refers to an ideal image of a Japanese woman. The name itself references the old term for Japan, 'Yamato', which is generally tied to sentiments of strong nationalism and the idea of racial superiority (Edwards 2007, Endo 2012, Ho 2014). 'Nadeshiko' on the other hand refers to a flower of the dianthus family, symbolically believed to embody characteristics such as delicacy and fragility, but also elegance and sturdiness (Edwards 2007, Endo 2012, Ho 2014). The name is linked to the ideal of a samurai daughter which is characterised as 'indefatigably proper, internally strong, but outwardly submissive' (Dalby 2001: 120). Yamato Nadeshiko is explicitly referenced in some of the *furisode* publications: 'you can become a sweet and graceful Yamato Nadeshiko by wearing a *koten* design *furisode*' (*karende okuyukashī yamato nadeshiko ni nareru koten furisode*, p. 21) is a proclamation put forward in *Furisode Kinenbi*. Young women are in this way encouraged to perform the identity of *Yamato Nadeshiko* when dressed in a *koten furisode* at the coming-of-age day, following and preserving an idealised form of womanhood.

Like in many other cultures, ideal images and discourses surrounding femininity have for a long time played a significant role in Japanese society. One of the figures was *ryōsai kenbo* (literally 'good wife, wise mother'). Discourse of *ryōsai kenbo* started emerging during the Meiji period when the state's government declared that Japanese women best assist the nation state by serving as wives and mothers (Koyama 2013). The role assigned to women was to protect the household of the blood-related family through domestic work, while equally caring for the newly created national family of the state through the maintenance of traditions and

conventions. Ideas that women have to be trained to cultivate idealised characteristics of modesty, elegance, tidiness, and courtesy, as well as notions of patience and endurance, reached new heights during this time period (Goldstein-Gidoni 1999: 362, Surak 2013). The practices of tea ceremony, flower arrangement and kimono dressing were proclaimed as ideal pastimes for young women to cultivate 'refined womanhood' (Goldstein-Gidoni 1999: 366, Surak 2013). Kimono increasingly came to be embedded into a discourse of refined mannerism and (restriction of) movements ideal for this project at this point.

Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni has argued that the discourse surrounding *ryōsai kenbo* continued to influence narratives and practices of women's kimono in a post-war context (1999). The scholar has explored how owners and teachers of kimono academies framed their education and practices as a step towards becoming a *ryōsai kenbo*, with many women eager to perform this identity when dressed in kimono (1999: 360-367). While *ryōsai kenbo* is not an ideal explicitly referenced through the narratives in the *furisode* publication, the discourse surrounding the *koten furisode* clearly references similar notions of elegance, appropriateness and refinement in relation to beauty and conduct.

It is not a suitable partner which this presentation is aimed at, however, but rather female relatives and friends. This notion is expressed in this quote from *Furisode Kinenbi*: 'Because of this being the day where I become an adult, I'd like my [female] friends to tell me that I look pretty, as well as be praised by my mum and granny that my adult self looks beautiful' (*otona ni naru kinen no hi dakara, tomodachi ni sutekinette iwareru no wa mochiron, mama ni mo obāchan ni mo, otona ni natta watashi wo kireidanette homete moraitai*, p. 32). This declaration points to the importance of receiving favourable compliments on one's outer appearance from friends, mothers and grandmothers. Nevertheless, while finding a marriage partner might not be the main motivation to dress in a kimono, young women are still encouraged to cultivate sentiments of feminine beauty and refinement.

It can therefore be concluded that the imaginative figure of *ryōsai kenbo* has been replaced by the image of *Yamato Nadeshiko* in a present-day context. Through the narratives presented in the publications, young women are encouraged to monitor and adjust their self-presentation and conduct to appear beautiful in a chaste and dignified way. If done successfully, she can obtain the label of '*Yamato Nadeshiko*', demonstrating her competence in adjusting to and performing an idealised vision of a young woman at her coming-of-age.

## Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have demonstrated how *furisode* magazines and catalogues narrate the *koten* style as the ‘authentic Japanese’ style which is suited for a ceremonial occasion such as at the coming-of-age day. Parts of the linguistic discourse focuses on the long-lasting artistic traditions produced by refined craftsmanship, manifesting the idea of a design which demands profound appreciation and recognition. The symbolic pattern design of *koten furisode* adds to this sentiment by referencing cultural practices such as seasonal awareness and honouring of one’s ancestors, creating a close link between *koten* designs and the *nihonjinron* discourse. The idea of a stable and superior cultural identity and heritage is further sustained by the standardised *kitsuke* which creates the impression that there is no alternative to this one way of wearing a kimono.

This discourse is protected by kimono professionals who gain their authority through being part of the canonising system creating the standardisation in the first place. They not just advise young women on the correct form of dress, but also assist in relation to self-presentation, manners and conduct. Young women are in this way encouraged to preserve an appearance of a ‘refined’ and ‘proper’ young lady at the coming-of-age day which is based on the idealised image of a samurai daughter of the Edo period, a *Yamato Nadeshiko*.

### Chapter 3: Tailoring the Male *Shakaijin*: Men's dress at the coming-of-age day

In the same way that kimono represent the normative form of coming-of-age dress for young women, suits represent the same idea for the male participants. As I demonstrated earlier, this idea is sustained through the reportage of the national newspapers which mainly represent young men wearing a suit, shirt and tie combination to their respective coming-of-age ceremonies. This chapter will further examine the image of a young man in a suit by analysing the advertising campaigns run by the biggest suit retailers Yōfuku no Aoyama (commonly abbreviated to Aoyama), AOKI and ORIHICA. I will also attend to the rising popularity of formal men's kimono ensembles as options to wear to the coming-of-age ceremony as part of this chapter.

Like in many areas of dress studies, a much bigger focus has been placed upon women's kimono in the existing literature. This is not just a phenomenon related to dress, however; in many early research studies on gender, manhood and masculinity has been taken for granted with scholars overlooking the equal instability and constructive nature compared to womanhood and femininity (on the topic, see, for example, Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 830-832, Dasgupta 2013: 7-8, Taga 2005: 153). Susan Kaiser has argued in this regard that one of the principles of hegemonic masculinity is that it is supposed to *look* like it does not take a lot of effort; in reality, male bodies are as much in need of correction and adjustment than female bodies are, however (2012). Clothes, after all, are believed to 'make the man', or, in this case, the male *shakaijin*, and I will demonstrate in this chapter that this requires significant time and effort, as well as attention to detail similar to the dressing process expected from young women outlined in the previous chapter.

#### Constructing Normative Masculinity: Suits as the uniform of *shakaijin*

The attitudes towards suits in present-day Japan are noticeably different than they are towards kimono. Suits are worn on a wide range of occasions, with different business outlets offering consumers an immense range of choice when it comes to styles, price, and quality. The two biggest and most established retailers in Japan focusing predominantly on suits are Yōfuku no Aoyama (commonly abbreviated to Aoyama) and AOKI. Aoyama is part of the Aoyama Trading Company and was founded in 1966, while AOKI is part of Aoki Holdings and was founded ten years later in 1976 (Aoyama Trading Company website, Aoki Holdings website). Both retailers have been very active in the post-war period, establishing themselves

as the main players within the industry over the last few decades. With around 800 Aoyama shops, and 500 Aoki stores throughout the country, these two retailers clearly dominate the ready-made suit sector in Japan.

Suit retailers in general are not dependent on sales specifically for the coming-of-age day, which is very different to the operations of the kimono industry. As a result, these retailers do not create specific coming-of-age collections but rather promote their existing inventory to young consumers in various ways. One approach is through the creation of ‘*seijin-shiki fairs*’, ‘coming-of-age ceremony fairs’, both in store and online (see Image 13). The creation of such campaigns, with specific commodities being marketed under a set theme, is a commonly utilised marketing technique in Japan. The domestic travel sector regularly administers destination-themed campaigns at department stores, marketing local product and travel packages to consumers (Creighton 1997). Suit retailers are maintaining a similar approach by advertising specific clothing items and combinations for the coming-of-age ceremony in this way.

Image 13: Leaflet promoting the *seijin-shiki fairs* held in 2020/2021 at all ORIHICA stores nationwide.

In the same way that kimono represents the normative dress for female participants of the coming-of-age ceremony, suits represent the same idea for male attendees. This notion is

maintained throughout the coming-of-age suit campaigns which narrate the garment as the normative choice of ‘proper’ and mature adults. The headline of the AOKI campaign for example reads: ‘Suits, symbols of adulthood, are the uniform of *shakaijin*’ (*shakaijin toshite no seisō. otona no shōchōde mo aru sūtsu*, 2019). The appropriateness of the garment is emphasised through its connection to notions of adulthood here, which is embodied by the ideal of the *shakaijin*. The *shakaijin* (literally ‘a person of society’) is defined by scholar Nana Okura Gagné as ‘a “mature social adult” who can independently recognise the importance and conditions of one’s social embeddedness, and act according to it’ (2010: 129). The term consequently evokes the image of a financially independent adult who is able to make sensible and ‘grown-up’ decisions about their career and personal life (Dunn 2018, Cook 2018, Robertson 1995). The figure is of great importance to the identity construction to Japanese citizens; the transition from an irresponsible child to a mature *shakaijin* is emphasised throughout Japanese society, and involves the general expectation of a significant shift in self-presentation and conduct (Cook 2018, Dunn 2018, Moeran and Skov 1997).

Personal responsibility and liability are two significant characteristics envisioned to be of great importance for *shakaijin* and this notion is sustained through the suit campaigns. The ORIHICA campaign states: ‘On the morning of the coming-of-age ceremony, you may equally experience feelings of liveliness and a sense of responsibility [*sekininkan*]’ (*seijin-shiki no asa wa, sonna shinsenmi to sekinin-kan to ga dōkyo shita fushigina kankaku ni torawareru kamo shirimasen*, 2021). A form of ‘rebirth’ as a proper adult is proposed here, with young adults imagined as waking on the coming-of-age day with a sense of renewed responsibility and dedication. This sentiment is further exemplified in a headline used in the Aoki campaign which takes the perspective of a young adult: ‘Although no one is accustomed to wearing a suit [yet], I want to make a good impression the coming-of-age ceremony where one should behave like an adult’ (*minna ga sūtsu wo ki nareteinai naka, seijin-shiki to iu otona toshite furumaubeki ba de kakkō yoku aritai*, 2020). Young adults are imaged as possessing a heightened awareness of making an appropriate impression as fully responsible members of society. Dress is narrated as an important aspect of this project, with suits being proposed as the ideal garment to sustain an appropriate *shakaijin* appearance and performance.

While the term *shakaijin* is gender neutral, many commentators have indicated that the figure is of greater importance to men. James E. Robertson has argued that this is due to the fact that men continue to be regarded as the main generators of income and, in financial terms,

‘central supporting pillars’ of the family (1995: 293, see also Dasgupta 2013). This sentiment is reflected in the suit campaigns which exclusively represent and advertise their collection for men (see image 14). The visuals are consequently dominated by male models in suits, with female models largely absent. Despite the fact that all retailers equally produce and offer women’s suits, these ensembles are not part of the coming-of-age campaigns. The image of a suit-clad young man becomes linked to the coming-of-age day in this way, which further aids the connection between *shakaijin* mentalities and manhood. The sentiment is completely different to young women who, through the previously discussed kimono publications, are encouraged to construct an appearance of feminine virtue and beauty based on the ideal of *Yamato Nadeshiko*.



Image 14: An image used on the Aoyama website to advertise coming-of-age suits in 2019 / 2020.

What is important to mention is that it is the specific image of a young man dressed in a collared shirt, tie, single-breasted suit jacket and trousers which becomes cast as the norm in this way. It is consequently not a morning coat, tuxedo or tailcoat type suit, but rather a business suit which is advertised as the most appropriate style to wear at the coming-of-age day. The garments are also linguistically linked to the business environment. The online

campaign by AOKI states: 'A plain suit is the best choice not just for the coming-of-age ceremony, but also for future job interviews' (*seijin-shiki dakede wa naku, sonogo no shūkatsu-tō ni mo tsukai yasui muji sūtsu*, 2020). This quote emphasises the garment's usefulness for the life course of young men, signalling the expectation to become a full-time employee at a respected company in this way. The appropriateness for the workplace is further sustained through the well-groomed appearance of the male models who are all cleanly shaved and neatly styled. Their hair is kept black or dyed in dark brown, sustaining a natural and not too flashy look. The aim of these elements is to create a dignified impression of a capable and confident young man.

The corporate business environment is largely structured around certain expectations and norms, with self-representation through dress being a very important aspect. Across the globe, companies preserve dress codes which assign suits as the desired garment of employees for instance (Mears 2014, Miller-Spillman 2019b: 209). While there might be regional differences, items of casual leisure wear are generally not deemed appropriate for the workplace. This notion is often assisted through publications which aim to support young adults in identifying the appropriate dress for the corporate environment. Throughout the twentieth century, magazines, books and newspaper columns provided U.S. citizens with advice and recommendations of business attire, for example (Marcketti and Farrell-Beck 2008). As a consequence, American university students are very aware of the need to 'dress to impress', believing that dress plays a vital part in creating and maintaining an appropriate impression (Peluchette, Karl and Rust 2006).

While these expectations are part of business cultures on a global scale, many commentators have argued that these are particularly valued and maintained in Japan. To train new employees in the desired conduct and appearance, many middle to large-size companies offer induction training sessions which include classes on business manners and courtesy (Dunn 2018). This training can last for a period of days, or even weeks, and consists of workshops, lectures, and off-site visits (Dasgupta 2013: 62-68). An increased monitoring of one's personal appearance is an important aspiration of this project; lessons in personal grooming, movement, facial expression, attitude and speech style are conducted to communicate the expected norm and conventions. The difference between personal grooming (*midashinami*) and fashion (*o-share*) is often emphasised through the discourses underlining the training sessions (Dunn 2018). Fashion is placed in the private, something someone does

for oneself, while grooming is located in the public, something one mainly does for others. Grooming is in this way discursively narrated as a register of politeness and consideration of others. Fashion on the other hand is framed as individual self-display, consequently attaching a slightly negative connotation of self-centeredness and narcissism. This sentiment is often reinforced through distributed check sheets which outline appropriate, as well as inappropriate, hairstyles, clothing, make-up and use of accessories (Cook 2018). In terms of clothing, smoothly ironed and clean surfaces are narrated as expected, with employees encouraged to choose orderly and conservative colours and styles.

Haruko Minegishi Cook identified the reason for the strict norms and regulations within the Japanese business context as aiming to avoid a negative impression of unprofessionalism and untrustworthiness (2018). There is particularly an emphasis to appeal to an older, potentially more conservative generation of supervisors and line managers who favour clean and neat styles over flashy ones. Additionally, due to the number of applications which far exceeds employment possibilities, large companies can easily reject all of those who do not follow these expectations (Ackermann 2016: 20). Young adults who aim for success in the corporate workspace consequently need to learn to respond to these expectations in an appropriate manner.

This learning already starts at the coming-of-age day and is enforced through the suit campaigns. The majority of advertised products are in line with the dress codes conventionally employed at corporate work spaces, for example. The colours of the garments and matching items follow the white-collar business dress code; it is particularly dark blue and black which are recommended for the suit jacket and trousers. The AOKI campaign linguistically strengthens this notion: 'The right style for a ceremony like the coming-of-age calls for dark colours such as black or navy' (*seijin-shiki nado no seremonīsutairu wa burakku ya neibī nado no dākukarā no shatsu mo osusumedesu*, 2019). The Aoyama campaign similarly narrates a navy-coloured suit as the 'osusume style', recommended style, narrating the colour as superior over all other colours (*ōdō-chū no ōdō no neibī*, 2020). Shirts on the other hand are commonly kept in white or light blue. In alignment with corporate business conventions, all items of clothing do not feature any motifs or patterns, with the exception of the occasionally patterned tie.

Suit itself are of course arguably recognised as representing modern manhood like no other garment ensemble (see Breward 2016, Hollander 2016 [1994], Musgrave 2019). Susan Kaiser

has identified business suits as the dominant symbol of hegemonic middle-class masculinity for the last two centuries (2013). The scholar traces the garment's roots back to the early nation building activities of eighteenth-century Europe: 'Part of the process of creating modern nations was the development of [dress] that represented modernity and nationalism alike. The hegemonic look epitomising British national identity, for example, was the male business suit'. The establishment of modern institutions such as factories, companies and militaries called for the standardisation of the workforce's attire. This was similar in Japan of the mid-nineteenth century, where suits, next to military uniforms, were embraced as a means to demonstrate the nation's military, economic, and moral equality with European nations (Breward 2016). As the government of the Meiji period pursued Japan's quest for modernisation and industrialisation, dress imitating European military uniforms were increasingly prescribed in the public sphere. The symbolical father figure of the nation, the Japanese Emperor wore a European-style military uniform in public for the first time in 1872, and henceforth on a regular basis (Dalby 2001: 67, Low 2006, Milhaupt 2014: 56-57). This dress choice was based on the sentiment to display the 'masculinity' of the Emperor whereas previous court dress had aimed for a more androgynous appearance emphasising notions of 'outer-worldliness' (Osa 1999).

An important aspect of the creation of the male form, or *kata*, are reflected in the tailoring practices which emerged as part of the discourse of the modern man. Tailoring practices for suits have largely remained the same through the last 200 years. The modern man's body is in this way constructed through a precise measurement of proportions and scale; fabrics have to be patterned, padded, lined and darted to result in a precise fit (Hollander 2016, Musgrave 2019). This practice is therefore oppositional to that of kimono where the shape of the garment is based on the *kitsuke*, with the material only fitted to the body temporarily. Suits include the shaping into the production process on the other hand, ensuring that a certain form and also size is kept by the garment throughout its lifetime. The final, gendered as 'masculine' appearance is proposed as a straight, curveless body with broad shoulders, a wide chest and comparatively small hips (Monden 2015: 24).

This is also the bodily ideal which underlines the coming-of-age suit campaigns for young men. Just as with the advertisement of *koten furisode*, it is particularly the models who strengthen this notion. The models are occupying straight postures which include upright upper bodies and projected chests (see images 15 and 16). One hand is often placed in the trouser pocket to add a sense of leisure and ease. Rather than seeming sloppy, this is done

with the purpose to convey a relaxed image of a confident man who has everything under control. An additional straight look into the camera strengthens the sentiment of determination and confidence. The models are consequently demonstrating a commitment to ‘getting the job done’, embodying the values and attitudes expected from newly hired graduates who are ready to take on the corporate environment. This notion is equally sustained through the accompanying linguistic narrative; the Aoyama campaign for example promises that consumers will experience a sense of calmness and dignity when putting on a suit: ‘Just by wearing [a suit you] will exude composure and dignity’ (*kiru dake de ochitsuki to hinkaku ga nijimideru*, 2020). Suits are narrated as assisting young men in the adaptation of a *shakaijin* persona which is based on ideas of rationality, confidence and efficiency. This is different to the normative expectations from young women who, as explored in the previous chapter, are encouraged to look pleasant and pretty in a more passive manner.



Images 15 and 16: Promotional images used on the AOKI website in 2020 / 2021.

These images and discourses bring to mind another important figure shaping notions of masculinity and manhood in the post-war context; the ‘salaryman’ (*sarariiman* in Japanese). The salaryman came to be associated with Japan’s miraculous post-war transformation from a

devastated country to the world's second largest economy between the 1950s to the 1970s (Dasgupta 2002, 2013, Hidaka 2010, McCreery 2013, Roberson and Suzuki 2003). The term 'salaryman' was commonly used during these decades. Tomochika Okamoto and Etsuko Sasano have demonstrated how the associations of the terms changed over time; while at the beginning of the 1950s, the idiom was broadly used to refer to any person who received a regular salary from employment, by the late 1960s and early 1970s, a salaryman was largely imagined as a male employee who served as the main economic provider of the nuclear family (2001). He was imagined to financially sustain a full-time housewife who followed the ideal of *ryōsai-kenbo*, as well as provide for one to two children. The change of family structures played a big part in the construction of this ideal, with a shift from the extended family model of pre-war times to the nuclear family model of the post-war period (Papp 2016: 50).

Romit Dasgupta has argued that, due to the structural social changes, this period saw the elimination of alternative ideals of masculinity embodied by such figures as the soldier or farmer (2013: 28-30). Japan's defeat and consequent demilitarisation by the Allied Occupation Authority included the addition of a 'Peace Clause' in the post-war constitution, meaning that the state was banned from maintaining any armed forces. The soldier was consequently not a dominant figure in the post-war imagination of manhood. Technological advancement and the adaptation of new machineries on the other hand meant that the agricultural sector could drastically reduce its labour force, with workers previously employed in this sector increasingly looking for employment in the growing urban centres of the country. The Japanese government mainly aimed for Japan to become a *kaisha shakai*, an 'economic society' based on the growth of corporate entities. The proportion of total employment almost doubled within the course of three decades, meaning that by 1975, Japan had become a nation of wage and salary earners (Levine 1983: 23). As a consequence, 'personal and family matters were shaped by considerations of employment and career in a company' (Ackermann 2016: 6, see also Tipton 2015, Saito 2006: 57).

The salaryman became the hegemonic male figure for much of the post-war period in this way. Even today, he is imagined as middle-aged and university-educated, and living with his family in the suburbs of one of the urban centres of Japan (Dasgupta 2003, 2013, Mackie 2002, Hidaka 2010, Kurotani 2013, McCreery 2013). He works long hours, and demonstrates attributes such as loyalty and dedication towards his employer, which, in return, rewards him with life-long employment and a promotion and salary scheme linked to seniority). In terms of

dress, it is a dark business suit, white shirt, neat hairstyle and lack of flashy accessories which is imagined to be characteristic of the salaryman. It is particularly the business suit which Japanese citizens instantly associate with this idealised figure; when Romit Dasgupta interviewed recently hired employees of private sector corporations, one of the first visual features the majority of participants imagined a salaryman to be wearing is a suit and tie (see Dasgupta 2013: 89-90). The salaryman consequently sustains a similar appearance to male *shakaijin* presented in coming-of-age suit campaigns.

While the salaryman came to be envisioned as the normative model in the post-war period, some commentators have spoken of the death of this ideal. This occurred behind the previously introduced historical backdrop of the bursting of the economic bubble in the early 1990s which initiated a long period of economic recession in Japan (Ackermann 2016: 7-8). Corporate bankruptcy was a common phenomenon during this time, and many employees lost their jobs as a result of the following restructuring measures. The suicide rate of middle-aged men reached an alarming high point at this point, with many suffering high levels of stress, anxiety and depression (Dasgupta 2013: 39, Kurotani 2013, Roberson and Suzuki 2003: 14). The previously idealised image of the salarymen became increasingly linked with negative associations. Death from overwork, '*karōshi*', or '*kitaku-kyōhi*', the phobic inability or reluctance to go home due to a missing emotional bond and lack of communication between a salaryman and his family, were increasingly becoming part of the discourse surrounding him (Herbig and Palumbo 1994, Hidaka 2010: 130). Sabine Frühstück and Anne Walthall have argued that, as a consequence, a significant number of Japanese men no longer identifies with this figure of the diligent and overworked company employee (2011).

Other scholars, such as Romit Dasgupta disagree and argue that many spheres of Japanese society are still guided by the ideals embodied by the salaryman: 'The salaryman continues to be pivotal to the ways in which Japanese corporate culture, Japanese masculinity, and [...] Japanese national identity continues to be imagined and framed' (2013: 4). Based on my analysis, I would agree with Dasgupta and argue that the image of the male *shakaijin* projected through the coming-of-age suit campaigns continues to be influenced by the ideal of the salaryman. While his look has been slightly updated, the image remains true to the virtues of hard work, including a sense of responsibility and commitment, and consequent self-sacrifice of personal taste and fashion. This is consequently similar to the framing of a young woman as *Yamato Nadeshiko* which shares certain attributes which the *ryōsai-kenbo* discussed in chapter

two.

## The significance of suit manners, etiquette and care

Suit manners, etiquette and care are throughout the campaigns presented as of immense importance to young men. This is exemplified in a short column on the ORIHICA website which outlines the important aspects of wearing a suit (see image 17). A focus is put on the jacket, socks, handkerchief and trousers, and emphasises desired ways of choosing and wearing the different pieces. The column advises young men to leave the bottom button of the suit jacket open, and recommends a handkerchief as a suitable accessory for a ceremonial occasion such as the coming-of-age day. Readers are additionally advised to choose plain-coloured socks in the same colour as the suit, as well as encouraged to select an appropriate length which exposes no skin around the ankles when sitting down. The correct positioning of the trousers, which should be fastened and positioned at the waist, not the hips, is linguistically and visually emphasised. Tutorials on necktie knots, with videos and step-by-step instructions outlining the processes, are additionally added to familiarise customers with the correct dressing process.



Image 17: A column titled 'important aspects to remember when wearing a suit' shared on the ORIHICA website in 2020.

Similarly, but even more extensively, the Aoyama website also offers guidance and support in the correct ways of dressing in suits. The introductory sentence of the ‘textbook on suits’ (*sūtsu no kyōkasho*) section urges reader to ‘not solely think about your outer appearance, [...] but also familiarise yourself with the rules required in various situations and scenes [...]’ (*gaiken wo tsuikyū suru bakari dewa naku, samazamana shichuēshon ya shīn de motomerareru rūru wo rikai shita ue de, [...], 2020*). Young men are advised to learn the correct behaviour and conduct for a variety of different social and ceremonial occasions. This sentiment of the need to follow certain regulations in terms of personal conduct is emphasised in a linguistic way through sentences such as: ‘a major premise of suits are rules. Without knowing the basics [of suit dressing], the result might be a rather unrefined arrangement’ (*sūtsu ni wa rūru to iu daizentei ga arimasu. kihon wo shirazu [...] arenji wa mushiro yabo ni utsutteshimau mono, 2020*). To avoid such an unfortunate development, the website assists readers by providing knowledge through manuals and how-to-guides (see image 18).

**基本編**  
**装いのマネジメント**

スーツにはルールという大前提があります。基本を知らずに挑む応用や、アレンジはむしろ野暮に映ってしまうもの。ここでは、スーツにどのような種類があるのか、着こなしのセオリーを細かく追っていきます。きちんと芯の通ったスタイリングを目指しましょう。

**基本を知る**

ジャケットの種類 ▶      スーツに関する基本用語 ▶      スーツ選びのポイントと注意点 ▶

**着こなし**

Vゾーンを決める ▶      シューズの種類 ▶      アクセサリーの選び方 ▶

**コーディネート術**    コーディネイト術 ▶

ブリティッシュスタイル ▶      イタリアンクラシコ ▶      アメリカントラディショナル ▶

わずかな違いが、  
 全体の印象を左右するジャケットのディテール

肩から肩にかけての美しいライン。構造的なシルエット。ジャケットほど複雑な設計図を持つ服はないのではないでしょうか。ラベルの先のデザインや裏地の仕上げなど細かい違いが数多く存在します。ディテールを知れば、より繊細なスーツ選びができるようになります。



- ① 上襟 (カラー)  
 襟別ス (ゴージ) によって区切られる上側の襟のこと。下襟はどバリエーションはありません。
- ② 飾りボタン穴 (ラベルホール)  
 下襟 (ラベル) に付いている襟穴のこと。この部分に花を挿していたことから、「フラワーホール」とも呼ばれます。
- ③ 胸ポケット (チェストポケット)  
 ジャケットの襟の位置にあるポケットのこと。プレストポケットと呼ばれる。
- ④ 前ひだ (フロントダーツ)  
 前身頃の胸から腰にかけて、裾に入っているつまみ縫いのこと。ここでは、ウエストの絞り加減を調整しています。
- ⑤ 前襟 (フロントカット)  
 ジャケットの前襟の形のことを指します。大きくは丸形と角形の2種類があり、スーツ全体の雰囲気にも影響するディテールです。
- ⑥ 襟別み (ゴージ)  
 カラーとラベルの縫い目線のことを指します。流行により位置や角度が変化。スーツの印象を決める大切な要素です。
- ⑦ 下襟 (ラベル)  
 代表的なラベルには、ピークドラベル、ノッチドラベルがあります。印象を左右する重要なデザイン要素です。
- ⑧ 脇ポケット (サイドポケット)  
 脇の縫い目を利用したポケット。バイピングポケットやフラップポケット、チェンジポケットなど、さまざまな仕様があります。
- ⑨ カフ  
 ジャケットの袖口のこと。「本切羽」や「開き見せ」など、さまざまなバリエーションがあります。
- ⑩ ボタン  
 基本的に、スーツのボタンは全部留めません。2つボタンスーツは上ひもとつたり、3つボタンなら一過と真ん中、中の2カ所。後戻りの3つボタンは真ん中のみ留めます。

Image 18 and 19: Columns and how-to-guides available on the Aoyama website (2020).

Similar to the general approach deployed in the previously discussed *furisode* publications providing guidance on different aspects of kimono, coming-of-age suit guides include explanations on the different types of suit jackets, shirt collars and dress shoes, as well as the basic terminology of the different parts and items (see image 19). Introductions to different styles, as well as instructions on how to choose the right suit and accessories are commonly added. To ensure the longevity of the garments, it is additionally strongly emphasised that the garments are cared for in the correct way. Knowing the proper way to iron the different items is deemed as essential: 'Ironing is a typical example of home care [for your suit]. It is an indispensable task to sustain the garment's smart and fresh condition' (*katei de no o-teire no daihyō-kaku to ieba airongake. tsuneni bishitto shita seiketsu-kan no aru jōtai wo tamotsu tame ni wa hissu to narimasu*, 2020). Young men are made aware of the right iron temperature for different types of fabrics, as well as being instructed how to correctly iron the different parts of the suit jacket, shirt and trousers to not create additional. Different types of cleaning are further explored, with both the procedures of professional cleaning services and at home solutions, such as hand washing and using a washing machine, covered in detail. This includes pictograms and descriptions on how to brush the jacket and trousers, and emergency tips and advice for the removal of different types of stains.

These aspects demonstrate that while young men need to select an appropriate suit for the coming-of-age day ceremony, they additionally need to become aware of the proper manners and etiquette surrounding the garment. Olga Vainshtein has demonstrated how men's dress often follows the principle of 'conspicuous inconspicuousness' (2010). This is the ability to dress elegantly and appropriately, yet unobtrusively and seemingly effortlessly. While seemingly easily attainable, aspects of 'proper' conduct and behaviour are regarded as immensely significant in the development and performance of young adult men. This is evident in the suit campaigns which teach young men in a similar manner to how proper etiquette and manners are presented to young women in the previously discussed *furisode* publications. Learning the appropriate conduct and taking proper care of one's suit is consequently one of the significant attributes which is expected from young male *shakaijin*.

#### *Hakama and haori as formal men's kimono*

I mentioned earlier how suits have largely replaced all other forms of men's ceremonial wear in the post-war period. Men's kimono is occasionally worn at ceremonial occasions in a

contemporary context, however. Modelled after the wedding ceremony of Crown prince Yoshihito and Princess Kujo Sadako, men, as well as women dress in ceremonial kimono ensembles for wedding ceremonies at Shinto shrines (Motoji and Motoji 2017). This formal version of men's kimono consists of a short-sleeved, white under-kimono matched with a *hakama*, a form of wide trousers tied on the waist, and finished with a *haori*, a hip- or thigh-length kimono overcoat (Motoji and Motoji 2017: 22-23). Similar to the previously discussed *furisode* ensemble for young women, this style has been standardised over the last centuries.

*Hakama* trousers became a significant part of men's dress during the Kamakura period (1185-1333) (Dalby 2001: 34). This period witnessed the rise of a new group in the higher ranks of society; the samurai. Samurai used to be exclusively responsible for warfare and armed conflict in previous decades, usually employed by, and therefore subordinate to, the Emperor and imperial nobility. The influence of regional samurai clans grew over the centuries, leading to the establishment of a feudal military government at the end of the twelfth century (Morton and Olenik 2004, Perkins 1998). Largely disapproving of the noble court culture of past decades, a substantial proportion of the ruling samurai class was eager to advance alternative cultural expressions and values (Miyazawa 2014). Lavishly ornamented clothes and adornment soon made room for a more military-inspired style. The *hitatare* combination which consists of a long-sleeved jacket and a pair of *hakama* trousers is an example of the type of clothing favoured by the samurai (Kure 2006). Dress ensembles were often amended to become functional for battle, with armour worn on top of *hitatare* to protect the body from injury (Dalby 2001: 34). This was of particular importance during the following Warring States period (1467-1615) when civil wars and territorial disputes became even more ferocious and intense.

As previously examined, this unsettling period of Japanese history came to an end when the Tokugawa clan rose to power in 1600, unifying the country through the establishment of a central government (Gordon 2009). The absence of warfare within the country meant that the Japanese population enjoyed a long period of peace, political stability and, hence, cultural prosperity. This period witnessed the birth of a variety of new forms of cultural expressions. The ceremony of *hakama-gi* (literally '*hakama* rite') came to be established during this time, for example (Papp 2016: 187). The rite was observed by samurai families with the main aim to communicate their heritage and protect the continuation of the family line. New types of dress were similarly developed, with the *kamishimo*, a two-piece ensemble consisting of *hakama* trousers and a *kataginu* vest worn over a kimono, becoming a favourite among the samurai

(Dalby 2001: 50). The most distinctive features were the wing-like shoulder constructions upheld by whalebone stays (see image 20). Similar to shoulder pads used in suit jackets, the main aim was to create a 'masculine' form of the human body.



Image 20: Samurai wearing a *kamishimo* consisting of kimono, *hakama* and *kataginu* (Dalby 2001: 51, 353).

Another significant social development influencing dress was the hierarchical system which was established by the Tokugawa government during this time. This system categorised the population into different groups based on their perceived usefulness to society (Nenzi 2008, Tipton 2008). Dress was envisioned to hold a purely symbolic function, directly reflecting one's social standing and position. As the social hierarchy was not based on economic wealth, these regulations soon created tensions, however. This was exemplified in the self-display of the hierarchical lowest, but economically most prosperous class of merchants who could afford to dress in sumptuous clothing ensembles. In contrast, the hierarchically higher but financially poorer group of farmers wore clothes made out of inexpensive materials fit for manual labour on fields and farms. Noticing this diversion in appearance, the Tokugawa government aimed to restore the social order by issuing sumptuary laws on the type of clothes members of each class were allowed to wear (Tipton 2008, Milhaupt 2014). While largely following the regulations, merchants and wealthy townspeople developed creative ways to showcase their wealth through dress; colourful patterns and intricate embroidery were added to the inner

layer of *haori* jackets to hide them from view, for example (Motoji and Motoji 2017: 36-37). This was soon noticed by the government officials, with the senior counsellor to the shogunate, Matsudaira Sadanobu, observing in 1789: '[D]espite the repeated issuance of sumptuary regulations [...], the people do not heed them' (Hur 2007: 278). While not able to completely control the dress practices of merchants and townspeople, sumptuary laws continued to be reissued on a regular basis to at least maintain the pretence of a monitored social order.

As mentioned earlier, men largely abandoned kimono during the following century when adopting military uniforms and suits. Cultural practices which continue to sustain the continued appearance of women's kimono have therefore almost completely disappeared for men. The custom of inheriting kimono from one's relatives is an example of this; while two of my female informants have worn kimono handed down from their mothers and grandmothers, this practice is almost unheard of for young men. Men's kimono is simply not passed on in the same way anymore. This also effects the affective relationship young men possess, or rather; do not possess, in relation to the garment. Many of my female interviewees described how they have seen their grandmothers and also mothers wearing kimono in person, or at least in photographs. They were consequently able to create an affective relationship to the garment, expressing a sense of delight and pride when talking about being able to recreate a similar appearance of themselves in the interviews. Similar representations of male family members wearing *hakama* and *haori*, and the development of affective feelings towards this form of dress now rarely exists as a resource for young men in contrast.

This notion is also present in the coming-of-age day commercial sphere where representations of *hakama*-wearing men are almost nonexistent. While there are many specialised magazines and catalogues for women's *furisode*, similar publications for coming-of-age *hakama* were not distributed at the time of my fieldwork in 2018. Most of the coming-of-age catalogues, magazines and online accounts exclusively depict women's kimono, with men's kimono, if at all making an appearance, only playing a marginalised role. The practice therefore sustains the gendering of kimono as women's dress. This is similar to the suit campaigns where the connection between the garment and men is re-manifested through the dominant depiction of male models in suits. In the case of kimono, this practice is connected to the business model of many kimono brands and makers exclusively focusing on women's kimono and not administering any form of men's kimono. As a consequence, no strong commercial infrastructure advertising and selling *hakama* and *haori* as a garment option for

young men to wear at the coming-of-age day is currently in operation.

When I interviewed professionals working in the kimono industry, many of them mentioned a perceived inadequacy of demand for men's kimono which results in limited business activities in this area. This attitude was exemplified in an interview with shop owner Inenaga Shingo of the kimono rental chain *kimono hearts*. When I mentioned the, from my point of view, shortage of *hakama* rental opportunities, Inenaga-san agreed and responded with a couple of practical problems hindering business expansions. One barrier is that shops and storing facilities would need to increase in size to adequately store and display the additional stock. This would result in an additional financial burden, which the store manager expressed his doubts to whether this would pay off for the business.

The store manager additionally brought up issues in relation to gender relations. An established practice with *kimono hearts*, as with the industry, is that shop spaces are not equipped with proper changing rooms. Young women usually change into an under-kimono behind a standing screen, and then try on different garments in the open floor space. Inenaga-san stressed that this is also one of the reasons why most of the sales staff working at *kimono hearts* are women; this deliberate staffing selection aids the creation of a supportive atmosphere in which young women feel comfortable to change and be seen in their undergarments. Hence, Inenaga-san was very conscious of reducing the potential of intermingling between men and women as, in his opinion, this would create an atmosphere of discomfort for all involved parties. Bringing in male customers would mean that these practices needed to change, and that proper, gendered changing rooms would need to be installed in the shops.

Inenaga-san's account demonstrates how the addition of men's kimono is perceived as just creating more issues for the industry, and a potential risk which might not necessarily result in economical benefits at this point. Most commercial entities are able to sustain themselves through a focus on women's kimono, anyway, so a large part of the industry does not perceive a need to change these established practices (see Itō and Yajima 2016: 48-86).

Another hindrance is the ambiguous attitude and perceptions of young men towards kimono. This is illustrated in the publication *Furisode egg*. In a series titled 'Ikemen's (Good-looking Men's) Coming-of-age Ceremony' (*ikemen seijin-shiki*, p. 73), three of the publication's nineteen-year-old male models are interviewed. They are depicted in flamboyant versions of men's *hakama* on the title page, as well as throughout the interview pages (see image 21).

While the interview questions generally focus on each individual's childhood and teenage years, the question of dress for the coming-of-age day also comes up. This is where models Chibo and Makochi state that they will attend the ceremony dressed in a suit. Both young men only wore men's kimono for the photo shoot, and expressed a disinterest in presenting themselves in the same way for the actual celebration. These two accounts demonstrate the somewhat inhibited aspirations and ambiguous attitude of young men towards wearing kimono on the coming-of-age day. This further reinforces the strength of the previously discussed normative discourse of suits as the 'right' form of coming-of-age attire.



Image 21: Male models wearing *hakama* outfits in *Furisode egg* (2011).

Alternative attitudes nevertheless exist as well, and this exemplified in the same column. In the interview, model Zukki discloses his ambition to wear *hakama* and *haori* to the coming-of-age ceremony. When asked for the motivation behind this choice, the young man confesses

that his girlfriend wants to see him dressed in *hakama*. He is consequently determined to respond to her request by doing so. This influence of the female partners of young men was also represented in the publication *Kimono Ageha*. One of the photo series depicts young couples dressed in matching coming-of-age kimono ensembles (2011, pp. 47-49). The inclination which motivates this practice is communicated through the title: 'I want to spend this important day with the person that I love. There is no better way to show our love to the world by wearing matching coloured kimono! (*isshō ni ichido no daiji na hi ni, sukina hito to issho ni sugoshitai [...] dare kara mite mo sugu ni raburabuda to omowareru tame ni wa, osoro no iro no kimono ga kihon da yo*, p. 47).

Dress scholar Myung-Sook Han has illustrated how the 'couple look' is a visual expression of the partners' romantic involvement (2005); through choosing a similar style, colour scheme and pattern, couples express their commitment and alliance through dress. This interpretation behind the dress choice was confirmed by Inenaga-san who told me that a significant number of young women frequently inquire on the availability of men's kimono. It is often female customers who are in a relationship with a young man of a similar age who want to either attend the coming-of-age ceremony together, or alternatively take photographs dressed in matching kimono. This account illustrates the impact of young women's perspective and desires on men's dress. While the initiative is depicted here as initially coming from the female partner, this practice might be equally as significant for the young man as it is for the young women in the relationship. Itakawa Mie, CEO of photography studio Nanairo Studio, told me that while women are usually the ones making an appointment and driving the decision to do a kimono photo shoot, men, while reluctant at first, often end up remarkably enjoying the occasion. Opportunities like these can therefore foster positive attitudes and viewpoints of men towards kimono.

Favourable perspectives towards men's kimono have indeed been strengthened during the last decades. Scholar Nanae Ishikawa has demonstrated how a renewed interest in men's kimono was developed during the 1960s, with a further increase in popularity during the 1980s (2001: 10). One of the reasons for this renewed interest in recent times is supported through *yukata*, light-weight summer kimono. The number of young men wearing *yukata* to engage in sight-seeing activities increased drastically throughout the 2010s, for example (Itō and Yajima 2016: 23).

Through my observance of the coming-of-age ceremony in the city of Kyoto, as well as the

interviews with young adults who attended different ceremonies throughout Japan, I further realised that a significant number of young men now dress in a *hakama* and *haori* ensembles for their coming-of-age celebration. With no official data available, it is hard to assess the actual percentage of young men wearing kimono on a national level. Based on my own, very limited observation, I would estimate that roughly thirty percent of male attendees dressed in *hakama* and *haori* for the coming-of-age ceremony in Kyoto in 2018. One brief article in the Kyoto section of *Yomiuri Shinbun* even mentioned the appearance of young men in *mon-tsuki hakama* at the ceremony (9/1, p. 29). The numbers might differ drastically in different geographical regions, however. The numbers in Kyoto might have been particularly high due to the city's perceived characteristics; Kyoto is often framed as one of the most 'traditional' cities of mainland Japan (Moon 2013, Surak 2012: 51). Kimono culture is additionally actively promoted by the mayor of Kyoto, Daisaku Kadokawa, who wears *hakama* and *haori* on a regular basis (Iuchi 2014). This sentiment might also have influenced the official poster advertising the coming-of-age ceremony which, in 2018, depicts a young man and woman dressed in full kimono ensembles (see image 22). The cultural context in the city of Kyoto might consequently have resulted in an increased number of young men wearing kimono to the festivities.



Image 22: The official poster of the coming-of-age ceremony in Kyoto. Picture taken by the author in 2018.



(image 22). The male figure is depicted in a way which makes it rather difficult to instantly recognise the worn garment as a *haori* jacket. Particularly due to the fact that the *haori* is dark blue in colour, the garment could easily be mistaken for a suit jacket. Anthropologist Jennifer Coates has illustrated how visual aspects of costumes in film are often chosen based on how they look on screen (2017). Red for example is a colour which holds strong symbolic connotations but also often gets selected due to its strong visual impact (Coates 2017: 9). This is similar to a women's coming-of-age kimono of which the different features, such as the tied obi and busy pattern, instantly draw the viewer's attention to the garment. If *haori* jackets wish to create a similar impression, they equally need to feature visually stimulating design elements. This is the case in the advertisement image created by RENCA (image 23) where the vibrant pattern of the *haori* matches that of the woman's *furisode*. This representation also results in an immediate recognition of the depicted garment as a kimono.

Hence, referring back to the lack of representation of young men in *hakama* within newspaper articles discussed in chapter one, this occurrence might not only be due to ideological reasons, but partially due to the characteristics of the garment itself, and particularly the way it looks on camera. It is often black-and-white photographs which are employed in newspapers, in which the difference between a dark coloured *haori* and white under-kimono and similarly coloured suit and shirt combination is very difficult to recognise. As illustrated earlier, the monochrome black suits of male attendees fade and disappear into the background, meaning that a similar issue would occur in the visual depiction of *haori* jackets. This aspect of the look of a garment on film might consequently discourage editors to utilise these images, but rather give priority to easily recognisable representations of *furisode*. As I have demonstrated, some businesses have found ways to recognisably depict men's kimono in advertising images. The recent increase in popularity from the side of the consumers might further pursue commercial entities to represent and include men's kimono into their business inventory.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how normative masculinity is maintained through the campaigns advertising suits as the 'correct' choice of dress for young men attending the coming-of-age ceremony. Business suits represent corporate middle-class values which include the personal sacrifice of one's individuality which is replaced by loyalty towards one's

company. These sentiments are embodied by the contemporary male *shakaijin* who is based on the post-war figure of the salaryman. While some commentators have spoken of the death of the ideal of the salaryman, I have demonstrated that it is very much alive, significantly impacting the discourse surrounding male dress on the coming-of-age day in contemporary Japan.

Young men are in this way not free from hegemonic gender expectations, but are, similarly to their female counterparts, expected to sustain an outer appearance and bodily conduct which is in line with these values. They are guided by the principle of 'conspicuous inconspicuousness' (Vainshtein 2010), meaning that they need to learn to dress unobtrusively and seemingly effortlessly, but nevertheless elegantly and appropriately. The selection of the right clothing items, knowledge on expected etiquette and conduct, as well as care of the garments, are all expected to be known and valued by young male adults. In a similar manner to young women, they are consequently expected to invest a great amount of time, money and care into their wardrobe to be able to maintain this impression.

I have also discussed how a *hakama* and *haori* dress ensemble is increasingly presented as an alternative option for young men to wear at the coming-of-age day. While a greater number of young men are dressing in *yukata* when sightseeing cities such as Kyoto (Itō and Yajima 2016: 23), it seems that the appeal of men's kimono has also recently reached the coming-of-age celebration. While there are some notions of resistance by parts of the industry against the perceived 'bothersome' inclusion of men's dress, young men and particularly women are increasingly demanding opportunities to dress in matching kimono outfits with their partners. Some parts of the kimono industry are embracing this new business opportunity, offering *hakama* and *haori* as dress options to young men while working around the visual properties of the garment which make it difficult to depict on camera.

## Chapter 4: Reframing coming-of-age kimono as fashion

In chapter two, I have shown how the discourse of *furisode* kimono as a ‘traditional Japanese’ costume prevails in *furisode* magazines and catalogues. This chapter responds to the discussion by demonstrating that an alternative narration, one which frames *furisode* as fashion, equally shapes impressions and notions of the garment in a contemporary setting.

Scholars have already asserted how specific fashion networks are aiming to change the kimono industry from within by creating fashionable and stylish pattern designs and sustaining a consumer culture based on notions of fun and playfulness (Assmann 2008, Cliffe 2017, Hall 2015, Okazaki 2015). While *furisode* is mainly regarded as a ceremonial and formal piece of clothing worn out of a sense of duty (Valk 2017, 2018), I will argue that discourses surrounding this specific type of kimono have equally been affected by this new narrative. Daniel Miller and Sophie Woodward have observed how dress-related industries are involved in market research to adjust to consumers’ concerns and needs (2012: 51). Many actors in the kimono industry are very aware of the need to satisfy consumers to keep their existing clients base and also widen their outreach (Itō and Yajima 2016, Hall 2020). Through a reassessment of the magazines and catalogues discussed in chapter two, I will demonstrate how parts of the industry reframe *furisode* as a fashionable garment, with consumers being encouraged to experiment and create personalised *furisode* coordinates on the way. The influence of the *gyaru* community has so far been overlooked in the academic study of kimono, so this chapter also aims to illustrate the subculture’s involvement in the creation of a new *furisode* style.

### The presentation of *o-share furisode* collections

A narration of *furisode* kimono as fashion is commonly found within *furisode* magazines and catalogues. This is mainly done by framing various aspects of the garment as *o-share*. *O-share* can be translated to ‘fashion-conscious’ or ‘stylish’ (*Nihon Daijiten Kankōkai* 2002), expressing a sentiment of the dress choice as smart and trendy. Penelope Francks traces the roots of the concept back to the Meiji period (1868-1912), when the custom of ‘going out to see and be seen’ became more and more popular (2012). John Clammer has demonstrated how particularly the period between 1920 and 1930 saw an increase in hedonistic consumption, which is defined as a form of consumption which does not only fulfil basic needs but also provides pleasure and avocation (1997). This period is when consumption of consumer goods in general became a ‘dominating principle of everyday life’ in the context of Japanese

society (Clammer 1997: 2-3, see also Gordon 2012). This development was due to an increase of production facilities and opening of new marketplaces such as department stores. Kimono, which at that point was still the most popular form of dress for both genders, was part of the realm of fashionable dress, with department stores showcasing the latest designs in their shop windows and catalogues (Thoelen 2020).

As discussed earlier, while kimono has largely become separate from the context of fashion in the post-war period, there are now some signs of a reconnection between the two (see Assmann 2008, Cliffe 2013, 2017, Hall 2015, 2017, Valk 2017, 2020). This is also evident in the case of coming-of-age *furisode*. One of the indicators of this restored affiliation is the straightforward use of the word '*o-share*' to label the garments within the publications. The opening sentence of the Studio Alice catalogue for example reads: '[Presenting] a *furisode* kimono collection which will satisfy all young women's needs for *o-share*' (*subete no onnanoko no oshare kokoro wo manzoku shite kureru furisode korekushon*, p. 2) while the LARME catalogue introduces 'twenty cute and stylish (*o-share*) *furisode* styles' (*kawaiikute osharena furisode sutairu 20 henka*, p. 3). To describe different parts of *furisode* ensembles, words such as 'trendy' (*torendo-kan aru*) and 'popular' (*ninki*) are prominently featured within the publications. These narratives consequently include the garment in the realm of fashionable dress.

A narration of the existence of trends (*ryūkō*) further strengthens this sentiment of *furisode* as fashion. A photo series in *Furisode Biyori* titled 'Stand out by wearing a *furisode* in a trend colour' (*torendokarā no furisode de minna no chūmoku wo hitorijime*, pp. 24-29) frames the colours red, turquoise, light yellow, navy blue, as well as white and black as the trend colours of the year. *Furisode Kinenbi* on the other hand introduces trends in relation to pattern designs in the column titled 'Spreading a 'happy aura' with trendy *furisode*' (*torendo-kan ippai no furisode de happiōra wo furimaite*, pp. 23-29). Wisteria flowers, as well as *kogara* and *ōgara retro* patterns are, according to the magazine, specific motifs and patterns which are up and coming this season, and therefore recommended to the reader as a fashionable choice to consider (see image 24). This narration is reminiscent of verbal discourses commonly utilised in Japanese fashion magazines (see Moeran 2004). *Furisode* are in this way constructed as garments not outside of, but rather as strongly influenced by changing fashions and trends.



Image 24: The *ōgara* retro pattern is framed as one of the *furisode* trends in 2018, *Furisode Kinenbi*, pp. 28-29.

This approach is further exemplified in the following quote which is part of a column discussing different obi binding techniques in *Furisode Hime*: ‘Surprisingly, although possessing a traditional feel, the *taiko-musubi*, or ‘drum knot’, was not born until the late Edo period. It is believed that the geisha Fukagawa, a fashion leader of her time, tied her obi like a drum knot, [a technique] which then spread and became popular with the general public’ (*dentō-tekina funiki no taiko-musubi ga tanjō shita no wa igainimo atarashiku, edo mi-kideshita. Tōjitsu no fashonrīdā demo atta fukagawa geisha ga taiko-musubi ni nisetemusunda no ga hajimari to iware, sono go ippan josei e to hiromatta sō*, p. 58). This quote narrates female performers such as geisha as fashionable trendsetters which have for a long time been involved in the creation and dissemination of kimono trends and fashions. Geisha have been involved in these endeavours particularly in relation to the chic, sophisticated aesthetic of *iki*, for example (Dalby 2001: 52-55, 325, Giannoulis 2013). This narrative consequently challenges normative discourses surrounding the *koten* design by offering an alternative reading of *furisode* which is guided by notions of fashion and freedom of expression. Readers are reminded of the fashionable culture surrounding kimono, and therefore encouraged to approach their coming-of-age *furisode* as fashionable dress.

The general utilisation of the models presenting fashionable *furisode* coordinates also differs from the presentation of models showcasing *koten furisode*. The practice followed here is much closer to established presentations utilised by popular models in young women's fashion magazines. Fashion magazines in Japan often have a cohort of models which are exclusively linked to the publications, with models ofte creating a name for themselves through the repetitive appearance in a certain magazine. These individuals come to be linked to the style of their magazine, being presented as trendsetters to the readers. This approach is applied to *furisode* as well with popular models presenting collections and personal styles.

In the *LARME* catalogue for example, model Nakamura Risa presents her personal *furisode* style (pp. 104-109, see image 25). Being employed as a model for subcultural fashion magazine *LARME* since the first issue, the nineteen-year-old model is known for her individualistic fashion sense and taste. Nakamura applies her sense of fashion and style to *furisode* and, in the column, recommends specific accessories, such as black lace gloves and socks, as must-have items for a stylish *furisode* ensemble. As the following quote indicates, the section is embedded into an individual approach over an adherence to set norms and conventions: 'While adding a *koten*-style bag is an option, you will be able to create a more personal ensemble by incorporating accessories which respond to your taste' (*koten-tekina baggu wo awaseru no mo kawaikeredo, rashiku shiagerunara komono de teisuto chōsei suru no ga seikai*, p. 105). This quote seeks to encourage young women to express themselves through unconventional choices based on their personal preference and taste.



Image 25: The column introducing Nakamura Risa's *furisode* style, LARME catalogue 2016, pp. 104-105.

This sentiment is also exemplified in a *Furisode Biyori* photo series titled “Which *koten* design will bring your individuality to shine?” (*anatarashi-sa wo kagayaka seru koten-gara wa dore?*, pp. 30-35). The introductory sentence reads: ‘*Koten*-design *furisode* are still the most popular [*furisode* style] at the moment. Although we tend to speak of the *koten* style [as if it represents one style], there are actually many different types’ (*ima, ichiban ninki ga aru no wa, yahari koten-gara no furisode. hitokuchi ni koten-gara to itte mo, iroirona taipu ga arimasu*, p. 30). The *koten* style is consequently not narrated as only following stable and coherent conventions. Rather, the quotes imply that *koten* designs vary greatly from one another, and that slightly different aesthetics exist as part of the style. This sentiment is strengthened through the accompanying visuals which depict different *koten* style garments; some designs are made up of bigger scale motifs and fewer elements in the pattern design for example, while others rely on an unconventional use of colours to create a contemporary design. The idea that there is only one *koten* style type of *furisode* is discouraged; the photo series rather demonstrates the design’s diverse and adaptive character which can respond to different tastes and preferences.

Young women are in this way encouraged to express their personality (*kosei*) and individuality (*watashirashi-sa*, or *jibunrashi-sa*) through their *furisode* ensembles. ‘Find your

own style based on your favourite colours and patterns' (*o-konomi no iro, gara de jibun dake no sutairu wo mitsukete*, p. 27) is written in the Wafu-kan catalogue, while the *LARME* catalogue encourages readers to 'seek what you like [...] find your special style which represents you' (*jibun no sukinamono wo fuka motomusubeki [. . .] anata ni niau, tokubetsuna omekashi wo mitsukete kudasai*, pp. 51-51). The publications consequently reinforce the notion that *furisode* can be utilised for the expression and display of the self. The reader is imagined as longing for this kind of opportunity: 'I want to celebrate the coming-of-age ceremony in a way that feels like me' (*jibunrashī seijin-shiki wo mukaetai, Furisode Daisuki*, p. 5). The assumption of kimono as 'traditional' garments, with the need to follow certain rules and regulations is consequently challenged through this re-positioning of the garment as a vehicle for self-expression.

#### Sentiments of *asobigokoro*: Self-expression through kimono coordinates

These sentiments of playful self-expression are within many publications framed through the concept of '*asobigokoro*' (literally 'playful heart'). '*Asobigokoro*' invites young women to approach coming-of-age dress in a lighthearted and playful manner. Young women are in this way encouraged to customise their *furisode* ensemble by approaching it as a fashionable 'coordinate' (*kōdinēto*). *Furisode Hime* narrates the 'fun and playfulness [*asobigokoro*] of a kimono coordinate' (*kimono kōde no tanoshisa ya, asobigokoro, Furisode Hime*, p. 10) for example, while *Furisode Biyori* recommends: 'Once you decided on your *furisode* kimono, the next step is to select accessories and coordinate' (*furisode ga kimattara, tsugi wa komono wo erande kōdeinēto*, p. 74). Kimono scholar Jenny Hall has pointed out how parts of the industry have aimed to make kimono more accessible by focusing on aspects such as play (*asobi*) and notions of self-expression (2015: 133-135, 156). These sentiments are similarly evident in the contemporary approach towards coming-of-age *furisode*; rather than portraying *furisode* as a static and 'traditional' garment, many aspects of the *furisode* magazines and catalogues emphasise how one's personal taste and imagination can be explored through the creation of an individualistic *furisode* coordinate.

The selecting and matching of different *komono* is consequently narrated as equally as important as the selection of the *furisode* itself. Throughout the publications, specific accessories, or *komono*, are deemed as immensely important in this regard. The *han-eri* and *date-eri* inlay collars, the *obi-age*, *obi-shime* and *obi-dome* of the obi sash, the *kami-kazari* hair

ornaments, as well as the *zori* shoes and *tabi* socks are able to strongly influence the overall impression of the coordinate. This is exemplified through the following quote from *Furisode Biyori*: ‘The impression [of the *furisode*] will change according to the hue of colour, materials and patterns [of the added obi and accessories], so we encourage you to try different combinations’ (*iroai ya sozai, gara ni yotte samazama ni imēji wo kaeru koto ga dekiru node, iroiro to awasete mite*, p. 74). Young women are advised to playfully engage with the practice of combining different items to see which ones resonate with them the most.

In the Studio Alice catalogue, an infographic titled ‘mixing and matching of *komono* results in different [styles / moods]’ (*komono-awase de konnani chigau*, p. 31) exemplifies this practice (see image 26). In the graphic, a previously discussed *koten* style *furisode* is used to explore how the addition of specific obi and *komono* can be utilised to create divergent styles. The model placed on top of the page is depicted as wearing a full *koten*-style coordinate, with the added *temari*-patterned obi and orthodox accessories and styling strengthening the conventional and ‘traditionally Japanese’ impression of the ensemble. Based on the selection of the obi and accessories, the overall impression can be modified, however. A ‘sweet style coordinate’ (*suīto kōde*), presented on the bottom left, can be accomplished through the addition of a pastel-coloured obi featuring roses, as well as different shades of pink and purple-coloured *komono* for example. A ‘retro-modern style coordinate’ (*retoro-modan kōde*) on the other hand can be brought to life through a blue and red-striped obi in addition to different *komono* featuring graphic patterns. Readers are in this way encouraged to tap into their *asobigokoro* to find a look that responds to their personal aesthetic taste and preference.



Image 26: The infographic demonstrating how mixing and matching of *komono* results in different styles (Studio Alice catalogue 2019, p. 31).

The importance of notions of *asobigokoro* are further demonstrated through the repositioning of kimono professionals not as ‘experts’, but rather as ‘stylists’. In the *LARME furisode* catalogue for example, the individual in charge of the furisode’s *kitsuke* is Yagashita Aya, a stylist who is known for her work in fashion magazine *LARME*. Yagashita is not framed as a *kitsuke* specialist, but rather as an artistic individual who puts together fashionable looks for expressive young women. Her kimono coordinates respond to notions of self-expression and individuality; she often replaces the conventional *geta* shoes with high heels for example (see images 27 and 28). *Tabi* socks are equally exchanged for eye-catching socks or stylish tights. Unconventional accessories, such as hats, are also often utilised to strengthen the notion of originality and fashion.



Image 27: A vintage-inspired *furisode* coordinate styled by Yagashita Aya (*LARME* catalogue, p. 15).



Image 28: Another example of a *furisode* ensemble put together by Yagashita (*LARME* catalogue, p. 17).

This approach is similarly followed in *Furisode Daisuki*, in which stylist Ishida Setsuko is introduced as a ‘charisma kimono stylist’ (p. 113, see image 29). The photograph which introduces Ishida depicts the stylist with a fashionably short haircut and big smile on her face. Ishida consequently conveys a much less formal and more fun impression compared to kimono expert Yasuda Takako who I discussed in chapter two. This initial impression is further sustained through a *kitsuke* column in which the stylist created four individualistic kimono coordinates for four different readers (pp. 113-116, see image 30). Rather than forcing a certain style onto the young women, the stylist expresses her main intention as adopting her styling to each reader’s personality (*sorezore no kosei ni awaseta*, p. 113). Ishida consequently is presented as much more flexible and playful in her approach and attitude towards kimono, resulting in the presentation of individualistic and playful *furisode* ensembles.



Image 29 and 30: The column of 'charisma kimono stylist' Ishida Setsuko, *Furisode Daisuki*, p. 113.

Models equally take an alternative approach to the presentation of *furisode*. These young women use their bodies in a completely different manner to the individuals modelling *koten* designs; a curvy and dynamic pose is commonly established through the bending and stretching of their body and limbs which provides the presentation of the ensemble with an energetic and lively impression. A still somewhat graceful but slightly less dignified and more quirky hand posture commonly adds to the display of playfulness and fun. The models' facial expressions are often slightly overemphasised, and somewhat child-like and/or girlish in character. Models consequently aim to embody an impression of a good-natured and slightly cheeky young woman who engages with the world around her in a lighthearted and carefree way. The make-up further assists this impression, with pink lipstick and blush, as well as colourful eyeshadow, emphasising the cheerful and lively aspects of personality. The hair is often styled in a more unconventional and experiential manner to emphasise the models' seemingly quirky and individualistic character. This impression is assisted by the hair accessories which are always kept in vivid colours and are commonly well-matched to the rest of the outfit. They can include girlish items, such as bows and ribbons, or decorative pieces of fabric. The nails are deliberately done in a playful manner, which is achieved by using different

colours and patterns in the design.

The path taken is consequently oppositional to the one detailed through the previously discussed *koten* design which is embedded into a discourse of feminine virtue and ‘good taste’. This narrative of *asobigokoro* assists young women in their endeavour to not conform to set conventions and follow the aesthetic preferences of others, but rather to express themselves through their chosen dress: ‘Wear a *furisode* which you are satisfied with’ (*jibun jishin ga nattoku shi ‘kore!’ to omoeru furisode wo kite*, p. 4) is a quote from the *Furisode Perfect BOOK* which illustrates this tendency. Young women are in this way reminded to please themselves over giving in to expectations and standards set by others: ‘Choose a *furisode* which makes you shine. By doing this, the people around you will also be happy’ (*ima no anata wo ichiban kagayakasete kureru furisode de mawari made happi ni shichaimasho*, p. 23). The individual desire is cast over the ones’ set by society here, and young women are stimulated to listen to and follow their *asobigokoro* to articulate their individuality through their coming-of-age dress.

#### The *gyaru* subculture’s influence on *furisode* practices

So far, I have illustrated how the discourses of *furisode* as fashionable dress are a stable component of many magazines and catalogues. Narratives which positioned kimono as a vehicle for self-expression started to re-emerge during the 1990s, a time when the kimono industry needed to adapt to the changing economic conditions of the country (Assmann 2008, Valk 2018). Japan witnessed a miraculous recovery after the nation’s defeat in the Second World War, with industrial reforms implemented by the government ensuring a steady growth of the economy from the 1960s to the early 1990s (Macnaughtan 2005). Kimono was a garment strongly favoured by members of the middle class who regarded the garment as a precious piece of Japanese material culture which could be handed down to future generations (Assmann 2008, Goldstein-Gidoni 1999, Valk 2018). This perspective ensured a revival of kimono, with the industry’s revenue from sales of the garment reaching its peak in 1981 (Araki 2018, Itō and Yajima 2016: 14). The economic bubble burst in the early 1990s, however, and economic recession hit Japan (Ackermann 2016: 7-8). This led to a change of consumption practices, with sales of kimono starting to drastically decline (Araki 2018). Rental options gained popularity during this time, resulting in a shift of the general image of kimono from a garment which is owned towards one which is rented (Valk 2018: 113).

At the same time of this change in consumption practices, a new discourse around

individualism started to emerge which is captured in the concept of *kosei* (literally 'individuality'). While initially being discussed on a wider scale in business circles of the 1990s, a debate about individual rights, expressions and freedoms reached all levels of society as the decade went on (Rear 2017: 12-16). Scholar Peter Ackermann, who identified the concept of *kosei* as one of the main aspects influencing contemporary ritualistic practices in Japan, states: 'In a sense, this usage of *kosei* [...] points not only to the wish, but also to the need to produce oneself in a form not fixed in advance but decided directly by the performers themselves' (2016: 12). Young adults aimed to break free from the norms and values upheld by their parents. Media scholar Satoshi Ota has argued that individuality was regarded profoundly by the generation of women who grew up in the 1970s and 1980s for example (2015: 257-260). According to the scholar, members of this generation looked for self-expression through modes of consumption, with media discourses of the time encouraging young women to 'live a life that connects one's consumption lifestyle with one's identity' (2015: 263).

The *gyaru* subculture, one of the subcultural formations which emerged during this time, was largely based on this interconnectedness between counter-normative forms of self-expression and practices of consumption. The subculture mainly consisted of young women in their teens, with the term *gyaru* being derived from the English slang word 'gal' (Nanba 2007b: 315). The medium of photography played an important role in the identity construction and performance of *gyaru* girls. Sharon Kinsella states that 'activities [of *gyaru*] were organised around camera' (2013: 78), with new technologies providing young women with opportunities to express themselves in creative ways; one-way cameras and *puri-kura* photo booths<sup>4</sup> were embraced by members of the subculture, resulting in a unique visual culture of *gyaru* style and fashion (Kawamura 2006, Menegazzo 2014, Nanba 2007b: 322-323). One of the first publications which was influential in shaping the term and resulting subculture was 'Gals Life' (*Gyaruzu Raifu*, 1978-1983, Shufu no Tomo). The magazine targeted teenage girls with a 'lively and unconventional colourful lifestyle' (Sakai 2009: 54). The introduced aesthetics and fashions deviated from previously established conventions and norms surrounding femininity and girlhood.

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<sup>4</sup> *Puri-kura* machines were launched in 1995 and quickly gained immense popularity with young women (Menegazzo 2014). The produced adhesive photo stickers can be personalised through backgrounds, stickers and messages.

Previous to the appearance of the *gyaru* style, the dominant form of female identity expression was based on the idea of the cute and approachable girl next door. This ideal was strongly represented in a variety of media products. Popular female singers such as Yamaguchi Momoe embodied notions of innocence and non-threatening cuteness which was based on and simultaneously emulated by a big part of the population (Nomura 1990, Miller 2006: 26, Watanabe 2011). Marriage was an important prospect for a young woman of the time, and this was equally emphasised through popular culture. *Shōjo* manga were largely focused on romantic tales of an innocent young woman being in love and eventually getting married to the same man for example (Matsutani 2012: 43). Matchmaking was a common practice at this point, with young women from a middle-class background being made to take portraits dressed in elegant kimono ensembles to attract a suitable marriage partner (Goldstein-Gidoni 2005: 164, Knight 1995). Young women's fashion magazines such as *anan* (1970-, Magazine House Ltd.) and *JJ* (1975-, Kobunsha) further maintained these ideals by presenting fashions that would 'gain approval from his mother' (in *JJ* 1985 August issue, cited in Yonezawa 2017: 22). Marriage was in this way proclaimed as the ultimate goal for a woman.

*Gyaru* lifestyle and fashions on the other hand promoted notions of individuality, independence and freedom of expression (Kinsella 2013: 73, Nanba 2007b: 317, Miller 2003: 85, 91, Reisel 2017). Rather than promoting conventional middle-class ideas of feminine virtue and demureness, the *gyaru* style was strongly influenced by women's working-class cultures (Kawamura 2006: 788, 2012: 89, Matsutani 2012: 293). Practices which would become synonymous with the *gyaru* style, such as the application of artificial eyelashes, nails and hair extensions, as well as darkening one's skin and bleaching one's hair, celebrated artificiality and gaudiness for example. Make-up and hairstyling trends such as *deka-me* (literally 'big eyes') and *mori-gami* (literally 'high hair') additionally emphasised notions of showy and exaggerated adornment. The style was further popularised by singers such as Amuro Namie, Hamasaki Ayumi and Koda Kumi who wore glittering make-up and body-tight, colourful outfits, often matched with bulky platform shoes (Miller 2006: 28). Department store *Shibuya 109* (*shibuya ichi-maru-kyū*, 1979 -) quickly established itself as a 'mecca' for the subculture, attracting a wide variety of young women who were looking for flamboyant and inexpensive clothing to express themselves through dress (Bull 2009, Kawamura 2012: 52). Young designers incorporated the tastes and preferences of their customers, with young women working in the shops being actively involved in the design process (Kawamura 2006: 791).

Yonehara Yasumasu, the founder and main editor of popular *gyaru* magazine *egg* (1995-, initially Million Publishing), classified *gyaru* fashion and practices as a resistance against social standards and norms (Nanba 2007: 334). In an interview with Mary Reisel, Yonehara positions *gyaru* fashions and lifestyle as a direct response to messages based on patriarchal norms which proclaimed that women need to dress and behave a certain way: 'The original [*gyaru*] of the 1980s and 1990s were unique girls because they were breaking the rules in the open and in front of the media, something that girls did not have the courage to do before them. They were not the traditional little obedient schoolgirls who were doing everything by the book' (in Miller 2017: 31). Scholars such as Makiko Iseri (2015) and Shinji Miyadai (1997) equally position the fashion and conduct of *gyaru* as a new type of identity for young Japanese women who did not feel comfortable with abiding to the previously outlined ideals and beauty standards of conventional girlhood. This refusal to adhere to submissive and 'pleasant' ideas of women consequently symbolised a change of values and sentiments towards the previously established cultural norms and standards.

Other dress practices which further demonstrate the counter-normative attitude of *gyaru* were the modification of their school uniforms. School uniforms were made mandatory for boys and girls during the Meiji period (Saito 2003). The overall design is standardised, and strict regulations are set in place to protect the correct wearing of the individual items. Students have engaged in practices to remodel these uniforms for a long time, however. During the 1970s and 1980s, male and female students adjusted their uniforms and created a style called *tsuppari* for example (Kinsella 2002, Sakai 2019). The remodelling included the widening of trousers for boys and lengthening of skirts for girls. In the 1990s, female students at Aoyama Gakuin Senior High School started wearing the thick, white socks usually reserved for sports practices with their school uniforms, resulting in the widely circulated 'loose socks' trend which has become closely linked to the *gyaru* subculture (Nanba 2007b: 317). Many young women additionally customised their uniforms by exchanging the standardised ribbons, scarves and socks for personalised ones (Kawamura 2006, 2012, Kinsella 2013, Miller 2003). Another popular practice was the temporary shortening of one's skirt to a length above the knee. Sociologist Koji Nanba argues that these activities were mainly intended to make the garments feel less like uniform and orderly attire but more like personal everyday wear (2007b).

This sentiment of personalisation through remodelling was also one which these young women brought to their coming-of-age dress. This is exemplified in a column in *Furisode egg*

(2011). In the section titled ‘Coming-of-age Photo Studio’ (pp. 79-81), readers and models of *gyaru* magazine *egg* share stories and photographs of their coming-of-age dress ensembles of the 2000s. While the majority of readers wore a *furisode* kimono in the previously discussed *koten* design, a significant number of these young women added unconventional accessories to express a sense of self through their outfits. *Egg* model Itabashi Rumi added lace sleeves and a bright pink decorative inlay collar to her coming-of-age *furisode* for example (see image 31). The young woman states that this was an attempt to personalise the garment which was passed on from her older sister. Besides the addition of unique accessories, young women also approached their hair and make-up in an individualistic manner. This notion is evident in the *furisode* ensembles of Nori and Tae who both dressed in a *koten furisode* but broke conventions by bleaching their hair blond and styling it in *gyaru*-inspired hair does (see image 32). They further added heavy make-up and wore artificial nails, two beauty practices which certainly would be discouraged by traditionally minded kimono experts. They nevertheless assisted these young women in expressing their personality through dress, however.



Image 31: Itabashi Rumi wearing her sister's *furisode* to the coming-of-age day (*Furisode egg*, p. 80).

Image 32: *Egg* readers Nori and Tae in their personalised *furisode* ensembles (*Furisode egg*, p. 80).

Throughout the 2010s, coming-of-age issues of popular *gyaru* publications such as

*Kimono Ageha* (Inforest, 2010-2013) and *Furisode egg* further encouraged personalisation by showcasing different methods of *furisode* modifications. In a column in *Furisode egg* for example, fifty-seven different ideas to adjust the *furisode*'s decorative inlay collar and obi cloth are introduced to the readers (pp. 57-60). The opening sentence narrates *furisode* kimono as fashion: 'Furisode are fashionable clothes through which you can play with various coordinations by mixing and matching the accessories, as well as [think about] how to place or tie [an item]' (*furisodette jissai komono asobi to tsukaikata to musubikata de mugen no kōdeinēto ga tanoshimechau oshare fuku nano*, p. 57). There is a particular emphasis on choosing accessories which responds to one's personal taste. In terms of the inlay collar for example, a variety of options based on different colours and patterns, as well as decorative elements such as rhinestones, lace, fur or pearls are introduced. The magazine additionally recommends different ways to tie the obi cloth, resulting in unconventional shapes such as ribbons and flowers.

Contrary to the discourse created around the *koten* style introduced in chapter two, the column denies the existence of certain rules and norms in relation to *furisode* styling. This sentiment is exemplified in the following quote which is prominently placed on the top of the opening page: 'There are no rules for a layered collar coordination. Enjoy the mixing and matching of colours through [your] existing sense for fashion!!' (*kasane-eri kōde ni rūru wa nai yo! itsumo no oshare fasshon kankaku de, iro no kumi-awase wo tanoshinchao!!*, p. 58). Readers are consequently encouraged to follow their personal preference and taste when it comes to styling their coming-of-age *furisode*.

These examples demonstrate that through customisation, members of the *gyaru* subculture turned conventional *koten furisode* ensembles into personalised dress coordinates. This approach was based on practices they were already used to; the rules surrounding *furisode* make it arguably very similar to a school uniform, with both garment types immensely relying on standardisation and formalisation of regulations and conduct. Rules can be bended and pieces of clothing can be modified, however, and this is precisely what these young women did. The shift in business practices from purchase to rental further assisted these approaches by creating more room for the expression of personal taste; the temporary possession of a kimono means that the garment is not regarded as investment which would be passed on, but rather as a piece of clothing which could be used as a vehicle for self-expression. With a significant part of consumers continuing to select rental as an acquisition option (Itō and Yajima

2016: 18, Valk 2017: 322), *furisode*, as demonstrated before, remains partially embedded into a discourse and practices of fashion and self-expression.

### The *mode* pattern design and *furisode* brand Sweet Angel

So far, I have demonstrated how young women of the *gyaru* subculture started appropriating available *furisode* designs through the addition of personal accessories, hairstyles and make-up in the 1990s. Besides including notions of individualistic guided by *asobigokoro* into the discourses surrounding *furisode*, certain sectors of the industry went even further and started developing a pattern design based on the specific taste of the *gyaru* community. This style is now known as the *mode* design.

One prominent example of a *furisode* brand which exclusively produces *furisode* in the *mode* design is Sweet Angel. The brand was established by kimono wholesale corporation Taiwa in 2008 (Yoshimura personal interview 2018). Discussing the origins of the brand, current CEO of the corporation, Yoshimura Takashi, told me that in the early 2000s, there was an increase in the number of young women who wanted to express their personality through their coming-of-age dress. This led to discussions within the corporation to 'propose a new style [of *furisode*] for the coming-of-age day' (*seijin-shiki no atarashi sutairu wo teian shiyouto*), resulting in the establishment of the Sweet Angel brand. A particular emphasis was placed on the visual aesthetics and design which was at the time summarised as: '[A style which] a bold *gyaru* would be thrilled about' (*hadena gyaru ga yorokobu de arou mono*). This illustrates how business people working at Taiwa identified members of the *gyaru* subculture as potential customers for a new style of coming-of-age kimono and referenced the young women's aesthetic preference to create a new *furisode* design.

These *furisode* designs envisioned for Sweet Angel differ from the *koten* pattern design introduced in chapter two. While some commonalities, such as the reliance on flowers as the main design motifs certainly exist, it is peonies, roses and lilies, rather than seasonal flowers, which are most commonly incorporated into the pattern design. Auspicious symbols equally make a much rarer appearance. They are rather exchanged in favour of unconventional motifs such as peacock feathers and butterflies or unorthodox patterns such as animal prints. The artistic interpretation of the elements is not based on the *Yamato-e* style as is the case in *koten* designs; rather, through the addition of winding and sinuous lines and decorations, the designs evoke an impression of the Art Nouveau style, a popular artistic direction in Europe during the

turn of the twentieth century. The design consequently stands out when displayed next to the 'traditional Japanese' design elements of the *koten* style.

Colours on *mode* designs are further used in a conscious way to create powerful contrasts, with black, white, bright red and gold mainly relied upon. Decorative items, such as rhinestones, pearls or glittering thread are additionally added to create a sparkling and shimmering effect which, again, assist the design in catching attention. This impactfulness is also maintained through the placement of the design; rather than displaying an abundance of different motifs on certain parts of the garment, it is often a large single blossom that decorates the lower part of the *furisode*. The combination of these elements results in notions of flashy and gaudy 'girliness' which can be clearly linked to *gyaru* aesthetics and tastes (see image 33).



Image 33: The Sweet Angel advertising campaign in *Kimono Ageha* 2014, pp. 68-69.

Besides the specific incorporation of aesthetic preferences, Taiwa additionally made efforts to collaborate with *gyaru*-specific publications to promote their designs to members of the subculture. The publication *Kimono Ageha* was specifically born out of these attempts for collaborations between *Koakuma Ageha* and Sweet Angel for example (Yoshimura personal interview 2018). These partnerships ensured the development of Sweet Angel into a recognised and popular brand with the *gyaru* community. Throughout the 2010s, the

wholesaler received orders from kimono shops throughout Japan who wished to add Sweet Angel *furisode* to their inventory (Yoshimura personal interview 2018). Many of my informants working in the kimono industry confirmed that Sweet Angel was remarkably popular with a certain demographic of customers looking for an unconventional style of *furisode* throughout the late 2000s and early 2010s (Aoi, Inenaga, Ohara personal interviews 2018). The brand became one of the very few *furisode* brands which came to be recognised among young women in this way. This is an exception, as, according to my informants, customers are often not familiar with kimono brands. Brands have always played an important role in *gyaru* consumption practices, so it comes as no surprise that a specific *furisode* brand would be endorsed by these young women.

Nevertheless, the popularity of the *mode* design has declined in recent years. Inenaga Shingo, who has been working as a store manager for *kimono hearts*, told me that the *mode* style was particularly popular from the mid-2000s until the mid-2010s (Inenaga personal interview 2018). The style has passed its height of popularity and lost a large part of its appeal in a contemporary setting. It has not completely disappeared, however, with brands such as Sweet Angel still producing and offering annual coming-of-age kimono collections. According to Inenaga-san, consumers have become slightly more conservative in their dress choice again, which is exemplified by the popularity of the retro style, a style referencing the colourful patterns and designs of the Taisho (1912-1926) and early Showa period (1926-1945). This design is aesthetically much closer related to the *koten* design than the *mode* style ever was; motifs of similar flowers as used on *koten* designs are reinterpreted in a playful and vivid style to create the retro style. The aesthetics are consequently not as counter-normative as the ones employed for *mode furisode*.

Nevertheless, the addition of the retro design has arguably further opened up possibilities for self-expression through coming-of-age dress. This is exemplified by the practices employed by rental chains such as *kimono hearts* and *TAKAZEN* are contemporary shops which categorise their *furisode* according to artistic guidelines. *Kimono hearts* offers different stylistic categories based on specific design attributes for example (see image 34). One of the attributes relates to whether the pattern arrangement dominantly follows either a *wafuku* or a *yōfuku* design principle, as well as whether the overall stylistic ‘mood’ expressed through the design is one of sweetness and ‘girliness’ (*amame, shōjo-teki*) or rather projects notions of being grown-up and sexy (*otona-teki, karame*). The final attribute of importance is

the differentiation between an overall *koten*, contemporary (*gendai-teki*), or ‘mediaeval’<sup>5</sup> (*chūsei-teki*) design sentiment. This classification results in twelve different *furisode* styles. One of the styles labelled ‘Neo Japanesque’ (kimono hearts catalogue, p. 11) is positioned as a sweet and girly interpretation of the classical *koten* style for example. The *Aderan* style on the other hand is introduced as the ‘Rock style of the Edo period’ (*edo no rokku sutairu*, p. 11), while the *Retro Modern* takes inspirations from the figure of the ‘Modern Girl’ (*modan gāru*, p. 10) of the Taishō Period.



Image 34: Kimono hearts’ *furisode* style map featured in the *kimono hearts* catalogue 2019, p. 9.

This demonstrates how brands aim to capture the imagination of young women by diversifying *furisode* designs and styles in a contemporary setting. While the kimono industry has been criticised for not responding to the specific demands and requirements of their customers (Cliffe 2016, Hall 2015, Itō and Yajima 2016, Valk 2018), brands and businesses such

<sup>5</sup>Rather than referring to a particular historical time period, the style references certain notions of European Romanticism and Gothic in its design principles.

as Sweet Angel, kimono hearts and TAKAZEN position themselves as receptive to young womens' needs by actively incorporating their tastes and preferences. This sentiment is communicated through the publications: 'Different to anyone else, we want to fulfil your request for your personal preference. Enjoy a style which makes you shine the most' (*dare-tomo chigau, anata dake no 'kawai' wo kanaete hoshī no desu. ichiban anata wo kagayakaseru sutairu wo tanoshimanakucha, TAKAZEN catalogue p. 1*). This approach has resulted in a variety of choices for customers, while simultaneously ensuring economic growth for these businesses.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how *furisode* are re-framed as fashionable dress in a contemporary context. Rather than pushing normative ideas and styles onto their consumers, the industry has included consumers' aesthetic preferences and tastes to reposition *furisode* as a vehicle for self-expression. This is done through a discourse which narrates *furisode* as part of *o-share* practices. This includes the narration of regularly changing trends in relation to patterns, accessories and binding techniques. Rather than blindly following trends, young women are encouraged to follow their taste and express their personality through the customisation and coordination of their *furisode* ensembles. The approach is underlined by notions of *asobigokoro* which captures a playful and lighthearted sentiment in relation to the engagement with coming-of-age kimono; accessories and *komonos* can and should be freely added and arranged to fit one's personal taste and aesthetic preference.

This point of view is inspired by the approach which was initially utilised by young women affiliated with the *gyaru* subculture. The context of the culture climate of the 1990s created space for alternative models to womanhood and forms of consumption. Members of the *gyaru* community approached their coming-of-age dress in a similar way as they did their school uniforms; standardised items were replaced with personal ones, and new accessories were added. Young women mainly aimed to express a sense of self through this practice. The kimono industry took notice and created a pattern design which responds to these practices and preferences of young women. The *mode* style was popularised by brands such as Sweet Angel which collaborated with subcultural magazines to disseminate the style throughout the country. This inspired new business models which focus on the continued creation of new *furisode* styles and designs.

The *koten* design is from this perspective repositioned not as the only but rather simply

as one *furisode* style out of many. Customers can choose a design that best resonates with them. This provides young women with greater choice and freedom to express themselves in the way they want. Young adults are in this way inspired to not mechanically fulfil pre-set expectations or rules in regards to dress, but rather are encouraged to tap into their individuality and unique point of view to select and style a coming-of-age kimono ensemble which 'feels like them'.

## Chapter 5: Lived experiences of young women selecting a coming-of-age *furisode*

This chapter will focus on the lived experience of young women attending the coming-of-age ceremony. This analysis is mainly inspired by the material studies approach pioneered by Daniel Miller and Sophie Woodward. Material studies encourages an increased awareness of the physical properties of dress, and with it the social implications that come with it (see Miller and Woodward 2012, Miller 2010, Woodward 2007). Dress has long been discussed primarily in semiotic terms, with scholars focusing on its symbolic and representative aspects. The approach taken by Miller and Woodward on the other hand places the magnifying lens onto questions of how dress acts as an ‘active agent or instrument, as it is a means by which people accomplish various tasks’ (Miller and Woodward 2012: 24). The scholars have questioned the representative aspects of dress presented by the industry and in the media: ‘There is an extraordinary discrepancy between the world of fashion and clothing that is portrayed by journalism and the media, and indeed by the commercial forces that create clothing, and the way ordinary people actually relate to that same clothing’ (2012: 61). While I have so far largely focused on promotional materials and the perspective of the industry, this chapter adds the point of view of female attendees of the coming-of-age ceremony.

The discussion is based on the interviews I conducted with eight young women, and focuses on the selection process of a *furisode*. All women had attended a coming-of-ceremony throughout the 2010s in different geographical locations of Japan. They all grew up in an upper middle-class household, are university educated, and, therefore, more likely to wear a *furisode* in the *koten* design over any other style. I was able to observe one of the interviewees in the process of choosing her *furisode* for the upcoming coming-of-age day. Throughout this chapter, I will demonstrate that young women make a variety of conscious and unconscious decisions when it comes to selecting their *furisode*, negotiating their personal preference with a wide range of cultural ideas and beliefs, while also aiming to maintain family relations.



Image 35: Young women celebrating their coming-of-age at the ceremony in Kyoto in 2018. Photograph taken by author.

### A Question of Choice? The importance of colour in the selection process

As discussed previously, young women are presented with a variety of options when it comes to the selection of their coming-of-age *furisode*. My interviewees acquired their garments in different ways, reflecting the range of different options in this regard. Within the framework of this study, five of the young adults I interviewed rented their *furisode*, marking this as the most popular form of acquisition. Two young women wore a *furisode* which was previously purchased and worn by another family member, while one purchased hers from a second-hand shop. This segmentation reflects the popularity of rental in relation to the acquisition of the garment (General Research 2018, Itō and Yajima 2016). Although sharing a middle-class background, and therefore potentially possessing the financial means for a purchase, many of my interviewees were not particularly interested in acquiring a new *furisode*. Chisato and Sayaka had the following to say in relation to the preference of rental over purchase:

“[Buying a *furisode*] is very expensive, even more expensive than renting one. Although I like the idea of owning my own, I feel like it would not be justified as there are only a few occasions where I could actually wear [kimono].”

“If there were more opportunities to wear *furisode*, I might have bought it, but there just are not [any]. Also, as I am living on my own [since starting university], I do not really have the space to store *furisode* correctly, and I also do not really know how to do so to be honest. Renting is [therefore] more convenient.”

The perception of the limited number of occasions for which a *furisode* is deemed appropriate is illustrated through the quotes by Chisato and Sayaka here. From the perspective of the young women, the high price of a purchase would not be justified due to the limited use value of the garment.

This perception was confirmed by the lived experience of Mio. For the coming-of-age ceremony in 2010, Mio purchased a *furisode* for a reasonable price from a second-hand shop in Kyoto. She told me that she had developed a fascination for the garment in her teens, with her affection developing as far as wanting to participate in the geisha apprenticeship programme to be able to wear kimono every day. While deciding to pursue a different career path in the end, she nevertheless thought it would be worth purchasing a *furisode* kimono for her coming-of-age celebration. However, nine years after the purchase, Mio had the following to say:

“Originally, when I purchased the *furisode*, I thought I would wear it much more often to be honest. I have only worn it to my coming-of-age ceremony, as well as my best friend’s wedding ceremony a couple of years later.”

When I inquired into the reasoning behind this limited adaptation, Mio responded in the following way:

This is my own perception, but I do not feel comfortable with wearing the garment anymore. The pattern is quite ‘young’, I would feel childish wearing it now. There is this

association of *furisode* with young girls, which is a category I do not feel like I fit into anymore”

Mio refers to the previously introduced connection between *furisode* and young, unmarried women (see Dalby 2001: 62, 116, Sawada 2006). This affiliation remains influential, leading Mio to completely abandon her *furisode* due to the, in her words, ‘childish’ pattern and sleeve-length associated with younger women. With such discourses forming a significant part of the popular imagination, renting a *furisode* is by many perceived as the more viable option (see also Valk 2017, 2018).

Once decided to rent a *furisode*, most of my interviewees visited one store and chose their *furisode* during a singular visit. By scanning through catalogues and websites online, most of the young women had gathered some information on the rental procedure prior to their visit. This provided them with a vague idea of available styles and designs. The selection process in the store took around two to three hours on average. The length is profoundly dependent on the amount of time an individual is willing to invest into the process, however. Lisa for example told me that she was not interested in devoting a lot of time to it; she had heard of people who had spent a long time visiting different stores to find the ‘perfect’ *furisode*. Lisa mentioned that she was quite busy with university and also her part-time job, resulting in an attitude of not wanting to spend an unnecessary amount of time on choosing her *furisode*. This sentiment was mirrored by most of the other young women who had similar commitments as part of their everyday lives. While producing a picture-perfect image of a young woman is framed as an important endeavour by parts of the kimono industry (see chapter two), many young women in contemporary times are very focused on their education and career. They consequently are not interested in spending an immense amount of time in relation to actively creating an image of a ‘*Yamato Nadeshiko*’, a ‘perfect’ Japanese woman. Many young women have not completely abandoned *furisode*, however, but nevertheless wish to commemorate their coming-of-age and regard dress as a vital component in this celebration.

The five young women who rented a *furisode*, as well as Mio who purchased hers second-hand, all acknowledged the wide variety of available designs. This results in the possibility for the expression of personal preference throughout the selection process. In chapter four, I have argued that the rental option provides young women with a greater choice in relation to identifying a *furisode* which matches their taste. Rather than being regarded as a

financial investment, the practice of only temporarily owning the garment opens the possibility for the design to reflect more fleeting notions of fashion and personal preference. This notion is confirmed through the following quotes by Chisato and Momono:

“After choosing a rental shop, I knew I could select from a thousand *furisode* in different colours and designs. My favourite colours are pink and red, so I chose a red *furisode* with a flower pattern. There are so many designs though, it really feels like you can choose whatever you want!”

“There were lots of *furisode* [at the rental shop], it was difficult to choose ... initially, I tried some green, blue, and violet [*furisode*]. These were the colours that I had identified beforehand as I think that they suit me the most.”

Chisato and Momono both mentioned the extensive quantity of *furisode* available at the different rental shops, resulting in the employment of personal judgement to narrow down their selection. The factors that came into play are a personal liking and preference, *konomi* in Japanese, as well as the perceived suitability towards oneself, which was commonly summarised under the phrase ‘*jibun ni niau*’.

It was particularly the colour of their *furisode* through which young women aimed to express their individuality. Chisato identified pink and red as her favourite colours and was therefore interested to wear a *furisode* in one of these two colours. Momono on the other hand prefers to wear green, blue and violet in everyday life, so she led the selection process be guided by this preference. The importance of colour was also discussed in an interview with LARME Model YuRi who states: ‘I have always liked the colour pink, so I chose a *furisode* with a flower pattern whose background featured a gradation from pink to white (*motomoto pinku ga sukidatta kara, pinku to shiro no guredeshon ni wo hana no gara no furisode desu*, p. 17, LARME catalogue 2018). These accounts demonstrate that young women are guided by their personal aesthetic preferences when selecting their coming-of-age *furisode*. They consequently follow the advice of *furisode* publication to express themselves through their dress (see chapter four).

The kimono rental industry further supports this strong interest of young women in colour through their business practices. This is illustrated by the following quote from Mako:

“At the rental shop, a member of staff initially asked me ‘which colour do you want to wear?’ I wanted to wear a red *furisode* so I was only shown red ones to try on.”

A similar inquiry was also part of Lisa’s visit to Kyōto Kimono Yūzen. After entering the shop, Lisa was promptly asked by the assistant what type of *furisode* she was generally interested in, with particular questions aimed to identify the colours she likes and usually wears. Lisa answered that she did not like overtly bright colours, tending in general more towards wearing subdued colour shades in her everyday life. While she was not set on one particular colour, she did express the wish to try at least one *furisode* in red. The young women working at the shop brought out several garments in red, blue and purple, but also encouraged Lisa to have a look at the display of *furisode* herself and point out any that she would like to try on. Lisa selected a couple more and, with the assistance of the staff member, tried them on (see images 36 and 37). This illustrates that the shop assistants also emphasise colour when initially inquiring into the customer’s preferences. Professionals working at kimono shops are consequently very aware that for young women colour plays an important role in the selecting process of *furisode*.



Image 36 and 37: Lisa trying on different *furisode* distributed by Kyōto Kimono Yūzen in April 2018.

Photographs taken by author and used with permission from Lisa.

The visit with Lisa provided me with an opportunity to further explore the significance of colour. When I asked Lisa about the reasoning behind the desire to try on a red *furisode*, Lisa explained that she regards red as the most festive colour, and therefore very suitable for a festive celebration such as the coming-of-age day. She consequently wanted to review how a red *furisode* would look on her. Once she put on the garment and started examining herself in the mirror, Lisa initially expressed the opinion that the red design definitely looked the most 'coming-of-age ceremony-like' (*seijin-shikippoi*). This opinion was confirmed by Lisa's mother Kayoko who was also present at the store. This perception of red, and particularly the shade of crimson, as the colour most suitable for the coming-of-age ceremony can be linked to the normative discourse created around the *koten* design outlined in chapter two; crimson is regarded as a 'lucky' colour and therefore associated with ceremonial occasions in the context of Japanese culture and society. Based on her facial expression and vocal tone, I sensed a slight hesitation and uncertainty from Lisa about this colour, however. She took the garment off comparatively quickly, voicing the opinion that it does not match her skin tone and makes her look pale. Her mother Kayoko supported Lisa in her decision by reinforcing the fact that Lisa usually does not wear overtly bright colours. This verbal exchange demonstrates that many different factors play into the decision of adopting a specific design. For Lisa, it was the perceived mismatch between her skin tone and the colour which made her decide against choosing a red *furisode*. Lisa stuck to more subdued colours such as purple and blue after this, colours with which she is familiar with and feels comfortable in.

While colour was consequently regarded as an important vehicle to express personal preference and taste, another design element, the pattern, was deemed as less relevant in this endeavour. Marina exemplifies this attitude expressed by most of my interviewees in the following way:

"I did not really care about the design to be honest, the choice of colour was of much greater importance to me. I did want a [*furisode* in a] traditional [*dento-teki*] design though."

Marina verbalises a low amount of interest in her *furisode*'s pattern design here. This attitude differs greatly to the engagement young women displayed in relation to colour which were of high significance for young women. While this could be due to reasons of unfamiliarity, Marina

demonstrated that she is not completely unaware of different kimono designs, however. She was able to identify a certain design as traditional, or *dento-teki*. While I discussed this design in great detail in chapter two, I was curious to hear Marina's interpretation of it. When I asked what she meant by a 'traditional' design, the young woman had difficulties in articulating her impression of it. The only distinguishing feature she was able to recall immediately was the characteristic that the design featured many flowers as design motifs. As the following conversations indicate, this difficulty of explaining their *furisode* design was a common occurrence for the other young women I interviewed as well:

Carolin: What pattern did you choose [for your *furisode*]?

Mako: [A *furisode* with] flowers.

C: Do you remember what kind of flowers they were?

M: Ehhh ... I didn't really pay attention to that part to be honest. I do not really remember the pattern that well. I mean, flowers are flowers, right?

Carolin: What pattern was on the *furisode*?

Aira: [It was a] flowery pattern.

C: Do you know what kind of flowers they were?

A: Ehhh ... no to be honest.

Carolin: What pattern did your *furisode* feature?

Sayaka: What do you mean by that?

C: Well, for example, would you classify it as a traditional pattern?

S: I think so ...

C: Did it feature flowers?

S: Not flowers, it was a black kimono. I do not remember the pattern that much however ...

The above verbal exchanges all illustrate a sense of detachment from the *furisode*'s pattern design. This once again demonstrates the different sentiment in the young women's engagement with the pattern design compared to the preoccupation with the *furisode*'s colour. This was showcased most clearly by Sayaka, who was able to quickly recall the colour but not

the precise pattern of her *furisode*. Both Aira and Mako also display a lack of knowledge and, hence, uninterest when it comes to the motifs featured as part of their patterns. While Marina was at least able to identify a design as ‘traditional’, all three young women simply classified their *furisode*’s design as a ‘flower pattern’ (*hana no gara*). The lack of a further design feature or interpretation is most obviously expressed in Mako’s statement that ‘flowers are flowers’ (*hana wa hana*), indicating a belief that there is only one type of flower pattern used on *furisode*.

As I have illustrated earlier, different artistic interpretations of motifs are employed to create different *furisode* styles. Nevertheless, it is equally correct that flowers are indeed the most commonly featured motif on coming-of-age *furisode* patterns. It is particularly flowers that bloom in late-winter and spring which are used most often. Kimono professionals regard the pattern as one of the most significant aspects when it comes to kimono as they should respond to aspects such as the season as well as type of occasion the garment is worn to (Dalby 2001: 18, 176-78, Nitanaï 2013). Many young women might not be able to recognise this importance, however. These occurrences consequently counter the *nihonjinron*-type discourse of Japanese people as inherently aware and appreciative of nature which I discussed in chapter two. Many young women have other priorities in their lives than to engage with kimono designs on a deeper level in a present-day context. They are consequently not necessarily able to distinguish between different types of patterns and identify specific motifs. As a result of this unfamiliarity, the symbolism behind the pattern and employed motifs largely loses its envisioned meaning. From the perspective of young women, rather than being a symbolic entity communicating an appreciation of nature, as well as other sentiments of ‘Japaneseness’, motifs of flowers mainly turn into an aesthetic component of the overall *furisode* design which is unchangeable. Young women consequently rather turn to colour to express their personal taste and aesthetic preference.

#### Female Relatives as Tastemakers: choosing a *furisode* which ‘my mother would approve of’

While most of my interviewees did not engage with the pattern design on a deeper level, it is nevertheless of great significance to mention that most of the young women ended up wearing a *koten*-style *furisode* to their coming-of-age ceremony. As I have discussed in chapter two, the *koten* design is indeed the most popular kimono design and is most dominantly featured in coming-of-age campaigns and advertisements. It might therefore come

at no surprise that a large proportion of young women would choose a *furisode* in the *koten* style. To further explore reasons and motivations behind this phenomenon, I presented my interviewees with some of the *furisode* catalogues and magazines which form the basis of the analysis in chapters two and four. When Marina flipped through the *kimono hearts* catalogue, she made the following statement:

“I do not like these ‘modern styles’ so much. I prefer the old style. The new ones are more for teenagers I feel like, with big motifs and patterns (*Marina looked at the kimono hearts catalogue and made a sound expressing dissatisfaction with the section on the mode patterns*). I prefer more, like, my ‘Grandma’s style’ (*She laughed*). When I went to the rental shop, I saw loads of these more modern styles, but I prefer the old ones.”

When flipping through the catalogue reaching the *koten* section, this was her commentary:

“Oh yes this is better! This one! *koten!* So cute! *koten! koten!* Like ‘old style’ (*She read out the text in the kimono hearts catalogue*): Like Japanese culture and traditions, from a long, long time ago. Yeah, I prefer this one! My *yukata* also [features a] *koten* pattern. I basically do not like really colourful styles. I prefer old, traditional styles”

Marina clearly states her preference for the *koten* design here, framing it as the ancient and ‘traditional’ kimono style. More fashionable pattern designs, such as the *mode* style, are clearly dismissed by the young woman. A similar opinion was also expressed by Lisa:

“When you look at magazines and also kimono websites, there is a certain style that seems to be particularly popular at the moment. [The style is] somewhat *kawaii*, very colourful, with big motifs and symbols. I do not really like this design though. You are dressing for the coming-of-age day, [and this design] is not appropriate in my opinion”

The quote demonstrates that alternative patterns might, by some young women, not be regarded as appropriate for the coming-of-age ceremony. Due to their colours and design interpretations, Lisa, similar to Marina, dismisses such designs as childish and, consequently,

as not suitable for the coming-of-age celebration.

This attitude therefore directly responds to the normative discourse surrounding coming-of-age *furisode*. As I have demonstrated in chapter two, the *koten* design is dominantly framed as the most appropriate design to wear at the coming-of-age day. As a ‘proper’ *shakaijin*, young adults are generally expected to be aware and fulfil social norms and expected behaviours. Wearing a *koten*-style *furisode* to the coming-of-age day can consequently be regarded as fulfilling this expectation and therefore demonstrating the ability to act like a ‘proper’ adult. This was the case for Lisa who aimed to demonstrate her competence as an adult through dress. Prior to visiting the rental shop for example, Lisa mentioned several times that she aimed for a *furisode* which communicates a grown-up sensibility. The repeated emphasis demonstrates the importance which the affirmation of her status as an adult held for Lisa. A significant number of young women might consequently wear the *koten* design to communicate a grown-up sensibility and impression.

Another aspect which is relevant here relates to the theorisation of taste by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. In the seminal work *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984), Bourdieu argues that aesthetic preferences are socially conditioned and, thus, largely determined by one’s social standing and class background. For Bourdieu, taste is ‘the basis of all that one has – people and things – and all that one is for others, whereby one classifies oneself and is classified by others’ (1984: 56). The notion that individuals are able to freely choose between different options in the marketplace is framed as illusory by Bourdieu. To a certain extent, the individual’s social background always influences the selection process, even if this is occurring on an unconscious level. Both Marina and Lisa stem from middle-class households, so, as argued by Bourdieu, their taste responds to and also expresses this social standing. Being placed rather high in the social hierarchy, this particular class segment largely aims to sustain the normative discourse surrounding taste due to the fact that they are partly responsible for creating it in the first place (Bourdieu 1984: 56). While the young women might not be conscious of this, they are conditioned in a way which makes it more likely that they develop a preference for normative styles. This was visible in the young women’s preference of ‘traditional’ styles over playful and contemporary ones.

While I have previously framed colour as an important factor for young women to express part of their identity, some choices can also be read in a different way. As discussed earlier, both Chisato and Mio framed red as their favourite colour for example, resulting in the

selection of a red *furisode* as their coming-of-age dress. While expressing their taste, red is equally regarded as the most appropriate colour for ceremonial occasions within Japanese society. Consequently, rather than being a 'pure' expression of one's personality, Bourdieu would argue that this preference has been largely conditioned by cultural perceptions and values to which young women are exposed to during the course of their life. The idea that this preference is a genuine expression of their taste would be dismissed by Bourdieu; rather, this inclination is rather influenced by their social standing and class background.

With these theories in mind, I was curious to learn more about the precise development of aesthetic inclinations and taste. At one point in the interview, Marina disclosed how her taste is specifically influenced by her social background.

"If I wore one of these modern designs to the coming-of-age day, my mother and grandmother would complain to me, like 'What is this? [The pattern] is not [appropriate for] a kimono!'"

Marina speaks about the influence her female relatives hold over her own range of choice in relation to kimono. The young woman mentions how, according to her mother and also grandmother, the *koten* design is the only appropriate design for a kimono. Both her mother and grandmother consequently frame the *koten* pattern as the 'legitimate' design and reject all other pattern designs. They would therefore certainly not be pleased if Marina chose any other design than the *koten* style to wear at the coming-of-age day.

This awareness has arguably influenced the young woman's personal preference; as demonstrated earlier, Marina clearly favours the *koten* design over any other style, not just for formal *furisode* but also the more casual *yukata*. Miller and Woodward have discussed how the inclusion of the points of view of one's social circle is not just a process visible in relation to formal or ceremonial clothing but actually all forms of dress: '[A] clothing biography is never entirely personal. Life histories through clothing always draw in relationships to others, such as parents, siblings, and peer groups' (2012: 30). One significant aspect in this regard is the constant referencing and checking of the opinion of others. The two scholars argue that taste is hardly ever shaped independently from the assessment of one's surroundings: '[I]ndividual preference is often the internalised authority of others or of social norms more generally' (2012: 36). Miller and Woodward consequently agree with Bourdieu that taste and personal

preferences are not developed independently, but very much developed in relation with one's social world.

Certain conventions further strengthen the influence of one's relatives over the selection process of a *furisode*. Sayaka, Ami and Marina all described visits to relatives when talking about their lived experience of the coming-of-age day. Ami told me how she experienced this part of the day:

"I visited many places to show myself dressed in a *furisode* to different people. My grandmother's house was one of them. It was the first time in my life I wore *furisode* so everyone said: 'Oh my god, you look so beautiful!'. My grandma actually started to cry, saying: 'Oh you are twenty years old!'. Overall [the experience] was very special."

This practice of young women visiting their relatives, such as their grandparents, adds another layer which relates to the negotiation between freedom of expression and maintenance of social relations through dress.

The coming-of-age day is in this sense not just a celebration for the individual, but also an important occasion to sustain and deepen family relations and connections. Peter Ackermann has argued that *kurashi*, living, shapes ceremonial practices and rituals in significant ways (2006: 11-15). A profoundly important aspect of living is the maintenance of good interpersonal relationships within the community. This includes being aware of people's viewpoints and attitudes; not to completely rely on or abide by them, but at least demonstrate an awareness to not cause an overtly negative reaction towards one's actions. This is demonstrated through the dress choices by young adults who, both consciously and unconsciously, need to negotiate many different factors through their coming-of-age dress. Many strive to maintain a good relationship with their family, developing a taste for and adopting a style of dress which particularly the female members of their family would approve of.



Image 38: Sayaka posing with her grandmother for her coming-of-age.

Photograph used with the permission of Sayaka.

While relatives consequently influence dress choices made by young adults in relation to coming-of-age dress, the most significant figure within this environment is one's mother. One of the occasions which strengthens their influence is the visit to the rental shop to which young women are often accompanied by their mothers. Mothers consequently give advice and assist their daughters in selecting a coming-of-age *furisode*. Contrary to my argument earlier, however, many of my interviewees stated that their mothers did not directly interfere in the selection process during the visit. Their role was rather framed as supporting their daughters in finding a garment which the young women themselves would like. Chisato told me the following in regards to the approach followed by her mother:

“My grannie chose a *furisode* for my mum to wear on the coming-of-age day. [My mum] felt very uncomfortable in it, and really didn't like the colour at all. She consequently encouraged me to choose something I liked and felt comfortable in wearing, rather than forcing something onto me.”

The attitude displayed by Chisato's mother demonstrates a certain sentiment of the post-war generation. Just as exemplified by the quote, some women of this generation keep negative memories of certain styles of kimono being forced onto them (see Valk 2018). Many would consequently not want their children to experience the same pressure, going as far as not pushing them to wear a kimono at all.

Nevertheless, while not directly forcing a certain style onto them, the influence asserted by mothers is nevertheless existent. Rather than directly interfering in the selection process, young women, as demonstrated earlier, might have already developed a taste and preference in line with that of their mother at this stage. As was outlined by Marina's comments, the wish to receive approval and avoid disdain from family members plays an immensely important role in this regard. The 'correct' performance of a young adult at their coming-of-age can therefore be regarded as protection against the chance of losing face and being rejected by one's community. Ackermann notes: 'The wish to belong, a realistic chance of fulfilling this wish by adhering to norms physically inscribed into the individual through ritual, and the outside pressure to belong exerted by the principal social players (family, company, and networks of graduates from educational institutions) managed to produce what many people will think of as "Japanese tradition"' (2016: 7-9). This also relates to the specific role of mothers to protect their daughters from losing their social standing. Some of my participants mentioned specific cultural connotations which were brought to their attention by their mothers for example. One of them relates to the connection between certain colours and the dress of the yakuza:

Carolin: "Did you ask your parents for advice on which kimono to choose?"

Sayaka: "I did, particularly my Mum. Do you know *gokudō*<sup>6</sup>? As [my *furisode* was partly] black, I think she was a bit worried that it would look like the wife of a yakuza gang member."

Sayaka later told me that she initially did not think of this association when choosing her *furisode*, but that she was made aware of it by her mother. The influence of mothers is

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<sup>6</sup> *Gokudō* literally means 'the extreme path' and is the most common name given to the yakuza in Japan (Adelstein 2009). All my interviewees used this term when referring to organised crime gangs.

consequently also asserted through the creation of awareness of cultural patterns and consequent avoidance when it comes to conduct and dress.

This finding of mothers as important tastemakers also relates to the argument by Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni who classifies mothers as important actors in the process of young women wearing a *furisode* to their coming-of-age celebration (1999: 358-359). While Goldstein-Gidoni's study on the coming-of-age celebration was conducted in the 1990s, young women in the 2010s are still influenced by their mothers during this process in a significant way. It should be acknowledged that in the intervening decades, some changes have taken place, however. In the 1990s, Goldstein-Gidoni framed mothers as the main drivers behind young women wearing a *furisode* to the celebration, with them having to put a lot of effort into convincing their daughters to wear a formal kimono in the first place (1999: 358-359). The assemblage of an appropriate picture of a young woman dressed in a *furisode* was recognised as an important endeavour to demonstrate a family's social standing at this point (1999: 359, 364-365). Mothers were consequently in charge of planning the majority of the arrangements, investing a lot of time and money to create an idealised portrait of their daughters at their coming-of-age. My findings demonstrate that it was rather the young women themselves who were interested in wearing a *furisode* to their coming-of-age day, however. Many young women regarded the day as a great opportunity to get dressed in a full kimono ensemble for the first time, with many mothers not actively forcing their children to wear *furisode* to the celebration.

Nevertheless, the opportunity to do so was often made possible by mothers as they commonly take charge of the payment. Melinda Papp has illustrated how consumption in Japan is gendered, with mothers being generally considered the household managers (2016: 54). Women are usually in control of the family budget, making them the main decision makers when it comes to consumption and expenses. This also the case with *furisode*, where mothers contribute a significant amount to their daughter's rental bill. This procedure consequently creates a financial dependency of the young women on their mothers.

This financial dependency is arguably particularly relevant for families from a middle-class standing. At the time of their coming-of-age, most of my interviewees were enrolled at a university full-time. Whilst this already indicates their social standing, it also means that the young women possess limited time to earn an income on the side. Some of the young women did have a part-time job and were willing to partially contribute to the rental fee, however.

Mako and Lisa promised to contribute to the final amount of the rental fee for example. This contribution might somewhat limit the economic dependency, asserting a certain independence in relation to needing to live up to their mother's taste. This is a strategy commonly utilised by young people all over the world; teenagers would acquire their own financial means to be able to purchase the types of clothing they would like to wear, largely independent of what their parents or guardians think of it (Miller and Woodward 2012: 26). Due to the high price involved in the rental of a *furisode*, young adults are oftentimes not able to cover the full fee by themselves, however. They consequently have to rely on their mothers to be able to afford the acquisition of a kimono in the first place. This dependency consequently ties the selection process of a *furisode* to one's mother, and therefore ensures her position as a significant dress tastemaker in a contemporary context.

#### Room for Divergence: Affective responses and the production of different images of the self

So far, I have demonstrated how many different factors influence the decision-making process of young women when it comes to selecting their coming-of-age dress. The wish to express one's individuality, while equally aiming to maintain family relations and, thus, demonstrating social competence all play a role in this regard. As I have demonstrated, this is a complex negotiation process which is approached in different ways and with various results by young women.

This was somewhat demonstrated by Lisa's final selection of her *furisode*. As I have outlined above, Lisa was very conscious to affirm her status as a proper adult through her coming-of-age dress. Looking at different *furisode* designs in catalogues and online, she initially rejected playful styles which she did not regard as appropriate to wear to the coming-of-age ceremony. However, rather than selecting the classic *koten* design, she ended up choosing a design which could arguably be classified as playful, and, hence, going against her initially held ambitions.

What was particularly interesting was the way in which Lisa decided on this design; the young women chose the *furisode* mainly on the premise that it 'felt like her' (*risa-rashii kanji*). Susanne Friese has demonstrated how female consumers often select clothing based on a perceived match between the garment and themselves (1997). Ideas like 'it said me all over it', as well as 'I can see myself in it' play an immensely important part in the selection process and final decision making (Friese 1997: 53-54, see also Woodward 2007). This sentiment comes

close to the discourses circulated through some *furisode* magazines and catalogues which encourage young women to express themselves through dress. Lisa consequently followed a similar notion; while quickly rejecting red as a colour for example, she seemed to feel much more comfortable in blue and purple colours. When she tried on the *furisode* she ended up choosing (see image 39), her facial expression slightly changed when inspecting herself in the mirror. In this moment, her face revealed a certain ease and comfort which she had hardly ever displayed when trying on one of the previous garments. It was eminently visible, through her facial expression and mannerism, that she had found ‘the one.’ While she still sought something of a confirmation from her mother, and also tried two different garments after, these actions seemed to re-affirm her already made decision of choosing this specific *furisode*.



Image 39: Lisa wearing her selected *furisode* in April 2018.

Photograph taken by author and used with permission from Lisa.

For Lisa, this particular *furisode* design balanced notions of her personal aesthetic sense and taste with a demonstration that her choice is in line with that of a ‘proper’ *shakaijin*; the colour was in line with Lisa’s preference of subdued tones, and particularly purple as one of

her favourite colours. Purple often makes an appearance on conventional coming-of-age *furisode* designs, so this colour balances self-expression with ideas of what is regarded as appropriate for the occasion. The pattern arrangement can be classified as non-conventional for a coming-of-age *furisode*, however; rather than choosing a garment with a conventional *eba-moyō* pattern placement, Lisa's selected *furisode* featured a *komon* arrangement which consists of a repeated, symmetrical pattern all over the surface of the kimono. Hence, compared to the more conventional *koten* design, this *furisode* is of a somewhat non-conventional nature which would make her stand out on the coming-of-age day. Nevertheless, the design uses elements of the *koten* pattern, such as seasonal appropriate plum flowers and *temari* balls, which are regarded as auspicious symbols, as main motifs. The design is therefore not overtly flashy or divergent. Lisa consequently chose an individualistic design which struck the right balance between self-expression and appropriateness from her perspective.

While balancing different aspects within one garment, a specific strategy employed by some young women is to wear different *furisode* to different parts of the celebration. The *mae-dori* can be utilised as an opportunity to negotiate the expectations set by the social environment. The *mae-dori* is a photo shooting in which young women are dressed and styled in the full *furisode* ensemble. Many *furisode* rental shops offer these as part of their offered services. To not overwhelm young women, the photo shooting is usually conducted prior to the coming-of-age day. As an object to commemorate the occasion, a professionally taken photograph makes a perfect gift for family members. Some of my interviewees told me that the *mae-dori* photographs were sent to relatives, and afterwards framed and displayed in their homes. Inenaga Shingo, the store manager working at rental chain *kimono hearts*, provided an insight into how this photograph can be utilised:

“Young women of today, they know what they want, they know what style they want to wear [to their coming-of-age]. I often hear from their mothers that their grandmothers want to see them [dressed in a certain way] however, so we also offer *mae-dori* services. [For the *mae-dori*,] the young women might wear their mother's kimono, having this image remain in photographic form [to show to their relatives].”

It is made clear here that the *mae-dori* photo shoot is used to portray a certain image of a young woman. This includes the selection of a certain *furisode* which reflects the taste of

potentially more conservatively minded relatives. While young women might wear a different garment to the actual ceremony, potentially one that express their own sense of style and taste to a greater degree, the photograph taken at the *mae-dori* photo shooting is one that can be securely distributed to family members, framing the depicted daughters or granddaughters in a certain way. In the *LARME* catalogue, model Risa also narrated her experience in relation to the *mae-dori* photoshoot:

“I always wanted to do a *mae-dori* photo shooting, mainly to show [a picture of myself in *furisode*] to my grandma. Until the day of the shooting, I kept my hair in its natural colour and also grew it super long. Immediately after the shooting, I got it cut very short and bleached it blonde” (2018: 95)

This approach taken by Risa once again demonstrates the negotiation of social relations through the adaptation of different styles. The model was conscious of how different elements of dress, such as one’s hair, affect the creation of certain images. She consequently made the conscious decision to keep her hair in a certain style for the *mae-dori* photo shooting. This was done out of the motivation to produce a certain image which her grandmother would appreciate. Arguably, one’s grandparents often have a certain impression of their grandchildren. This image is likely tamer and more child-like than the one an individual might like to show at the ceremony where one is closely surrounded by friends. Inenaga told me that because of these conventions, some clients go as far as choosing two different *furisode* to wear even for the *mae-dori*, one ‘proper’ garment which results in a picture given to family members, and one more playful and individualistic one to keep for themselves or distribute to one’s close friends. This practice once again demonstrates the need for young women to negotiate social relationships through the choice of their coming-of-age kimono in complex ways. The *mae-dori* plays an important part in this negotiation process, with young women being able to produce and manage the distribution of different images of the self.

## Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have demonstrated the complex negotiation process underlying the selection of a *furisode* for the coming-of-age day. While, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, the kimono industry is nowadays providing young women with a wide

variety of choice in relation to designs and styles, many different factors influence the final *furisode* selection process. Young women who come from a middle-class background need to find the balance between an expression of their own individuality with the sustainment of family relations. Different elements of the *furisode's* appearance, such as colour or pattern design, are approached by the young women in different ways according to these needs. Some assist in expressing individuality (the colour), while others are perceived as less adaptable (the pattern). This balancing act is further complicated by the economic dependency on their mothers, with young women likely to reproduce a certain taste which they might consider as expected on this ceremonial occasion. The decision to wear a *koten* design can be read as the 'safest' choice in this regard as it most likely creates an immediately positive response and acceptance from members of one's family, as well as wider society.

This chapter has equally demonstrated that the selection of a *koten* design does not necessarily mean that the individual blindly reproduces notions of 'traditional Japaneseness' and the ideal of *Yamato Nadeshiko* discussed in chapter two. They are certainly not just 'dolls in boxes' (Goldstein-Gidoni 1999: 36) but make use of the variety of options presented to them. For young women, it is therefore possible to equally maintain and conform to a certain level of norms and expectations, whilst at the same time be fashionable and express the self through dress.

## Chapter 6: Challenging normative gender ideals? Alternative forms of coming-of-age dress

While I have discussed negotiations in the previous section, this last chapter will place the magnifying lense on how some young adults contest the previously described normative discourses surrounding gendered coming-of-age adulthood. While scholars have pointed out the strong capabilities of the ruling class to influence social norms and values (see, for example, Bourdieu 1984), Antoni Gramsci, among others, defines cultural processes not as purely monolithic, but rather as dialectic (Connell 1977). The scholar recognises social divergence and a certain power of the lower classes to contest meanings and values. Following this sentiment, a diverse range of scholars have demonstrated how Japanese subcultures have aimed to challenge established values and meanings in a post-war context. In 'Fashioning Japanese Subcultures' (2012), sociologist Yuniya Kawamura examines the complex social networks of Tokyo's subcultures where a variety of sub-groups differentiate themselves from hegemonic values, norms and beliefs through their style and aesthetic expressions. Kawamura thus showcases that these individuals 'treat their image and appearance making very seriously' (2012: 4), resulting in the positioning of dress as 'vital to the theoretical understanding of [Japanese] subcultures' (2012: 1).

While Kawamura mainly focused on female-led subcultures based in Tokyo, cultural studies scholar Masafumi Monden broadened this analysis to include male-led subcultures, asserting how young men communicate their oppositional stance towards hegemonic ideals through dress (2012). Sociologist Hiroshi Narumi further demonstrated how subcultures often emerged from a working-class environment in the many suburban parts of Japan (2009, see also Nagae 2009, Nanba 2009a). They equally use dress in creative ways to express their dissatisfaction with the status quo; elements associated with delinquency and punk cultures are often combined to create customised and excessive forms of dress. As a consequence, the dress style of subcultural formation is generally known for its 'brazen gaudiness' (Monden 2015: 118) and considered 'vulgar', 'rough' and in 'bad taste' by a big part of the population.

Drawing on these theories, I will demonstrate that subcultural formations play a significant role in the creation of alternative models of coming-of-age adulthood. These models are fashioned through dress, and I will discuss whether and how styles such as the *hade hakama* and *oiran kitsuke* aim to contest ideas of normative femininity and masculinity.

## Kitakyūshū's *hade hakama*: Customisations of dress to attract attention and express belonging

A flamboyant men's kimono style originated in the city of Kitakyūshū, Fukuoka prefecture. The style rose to nationwide fame when featured on several morning television programmes of the *waidoshō* category in 2014 (Ikeda personal interview 2018). These programmes have continued to include segments of young adults wearing the style to their respective coming-of-age ceremonies ever since. In 2018 for example, both Fuji Television's *Mezamashi Terebi* and *Tokudane!*, as well as TBS' *Bibitto* discussed the style in their broadcast aired on January 8th. Images of groups, as well as individuals dressed in elaborate and colourful kimono ensembles were shown throughout these segments. Some of the young adults were interviewed for the programme, providing the viewer with further information behind the inspiration of the outfits. The main linguistic description of the style is '*hade*', meaning bold or flashy, with the aim of making an impact and standing out (*Nihon Daijiten Kankōkai* 2002). The word is used in opposition to '*jimi*', which means 'plain', which carries a connotation of fitting in and conforming to a certain standard, and, therefore, not aiming to visually stand out at all. I have consequently dubbed this style the *hade hakama*.

The kimono rental shop Miyabi located in the area of Kokurakita-ku in Kitakyūshū plays a key role in the creation of the *hade hakama* style. The store produces many of the flashy costumes worn by young adults to the ceremony. As part of my fieldwork in 2018, I interviewed Ikeda Miyabi, Miyabi's owner and manager. Ikeda-san opened Miyabi in 1995 as a bridal and wedding studio focused on wedding attire, as well as bridal make-up and hairstyling services. Handling formal kimono as part of this work, the store also provided young women with coming-of-age *furisode* and young men with the occasional *hakama* and *haori* ensemble.

It was in 2003 when two male customers preparing for their coming-of-age celebration came to visit Miyabi. The two young men had sustained a close relationship since childhood, and intended to visualise their bond through their coming-of-age dress. To do so, they had decided to wear matching *hakama* ensembles to the occasion, one in gold and the other in silver. This bold colour choice was inspired by the specific venue at which the coming-of-age ceremony in Kitakyūshū was held at the time: Space World, a popular theme park revolving around the theme of space travel and the universe. The venue had already inspired some slightly extravagant fashions in previous years, with young adults coordinating parts of their outfits to match the theme of the venue. Having a full outfit, particularly a kimono ensemble,

dedicated to outer space was something Ikeda-san had not previously encountered, however. This proved to become a difficulty for the seamstress; as mentioned earlier, men's kimono ensembles are mainly offered as part of ready-made collections in neutral and dark colours such as black, grey, and dark blue. The two young men were not interested in these conventional offers however, but rather envisioned something more individualistic.

At the time of the young men's visit, Ikeda-san had no idea how to provide the two young men with the outfits. While she owned a couple of formal men's kimono ensembles, these too followed the conventional colour schemes of dark blue and black. Regarding the two men as valuable customers, she nevertheless accepted their request and set out to provide them with the outfits. When she got in touch with her various contacts in the industry, she soon realised that no provider was offering men's kimono in the requested style, however. Ikeda-san soon realised that, if she wanted to fulfil the two young men's inquiry, she had to make the outfits herself. She consequently began ordering different fabrics to see which ones would best be suited for the production of *hakama* trousers and *haori* jackets. The completion of the outfits took much longer than expected, with Ikeda-san facing many challenges and failed attempts along the way. After around six months of labour, she was eventually able to put the two *hakama* ensembles together. The individual pieces were mainly created out of unusual materials such as brocade and fabrics with a light-reflective quality (see image 40). The customers were more than thrilled when they first saw the finished outfits and wore them proudly to the coming-of-age ceremony. Mainly due to the colours, the two customers became locally known as '*Kin-san*', gold-san, and '*Gin-san*', silver-san. The outfits attracted a lot of attention during the event, with customers visiting Miyabi as early as the day after the ceremony to order equally ostentatious ensembles for the following year.



Image 40: The outfits Ikeda-san created for the two customers in 2003.

While single-coloured outfits incorporating gold and silver became more popular from this time onwards, the style evolved even further in the course of the decade. It was again an individual outside of the industry who started this trend. In 2008, a young man visited Miyabi, with a request which topped all previous ones. The young man had already made a name for himself in his hometown of Yukuhashi, a neighbouring town of Kitakyūshū, where he was widely known as the 'Rainbow King'. Aiming to personalise his coming-of-age dress, the young man approached Ikeda-san with a hand-drawn picture of a *hakama* in rainbow colours, as well as a golden, wide-shouldered *kataginu* vest. Ikeda-san was once again slightly overwhelmed by the request, but embarked to complete the outfit with the same determination she had employed previously. While a multi-coloured *hakama* and wide-shouldered *kataginu* vest were much more difficult to construct than the previously requested single-coloured outfits, she nevertheless once again succeeded, being met with excitement and joy by her customer upon

completion. This outfit also gained immense attention during the ceremony, further advertising the advanced sewing and crafting skills of the manager.

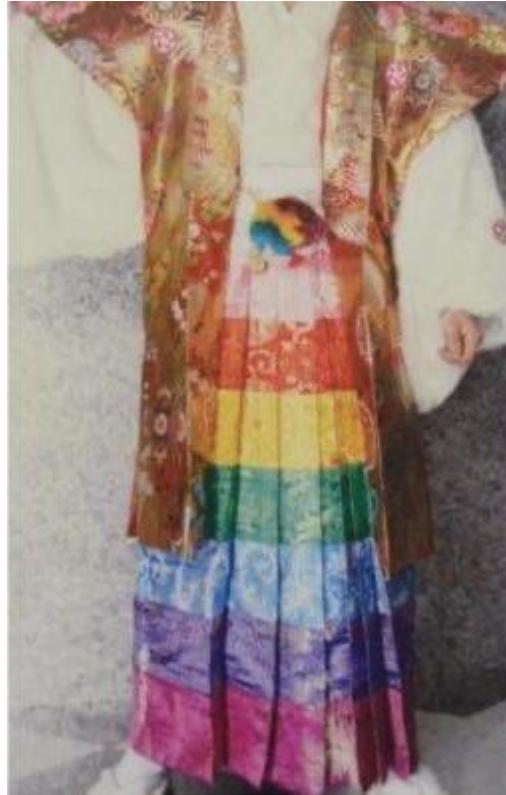


Image 41: The outfit of the 'Rainbow King' created by Ikeda-san in 2008.

These occurrences have resulted in a lively consumer culture surrounding men's kimono in Kitakyūshū. A significant number of young men wear colourful *hakama* ensembles to the ceremony. Besides single-coloured fabrics, *hakama* and *haori* featuring geometrical *koten* patterns, such as the six-sided tortoise-shell called *kikkō* or the interlocking circles of *shippō* in ornate colours such as shimmery gold or silver have become particular popular over the years. Just as initially envisioned by the Rainbow King, the basic silhouette of a men's kimono outfit is often modified and extended through the addition of various elements. Some young adults wear a *furisode* instead of a short-sleeved kimono under their *haori* jacket for example. The long sleeves of the *furisode* add volume to the overall ensemble and extend the silhouette to appear larger (see images 42, 43 and 44). Shoulder pads and bulky, decorated collars are added to visually extend the upper part of the outfits (see image 43 and 44). Additional props such as wings, fur and feathers are attached to create a 'larger than life' impression (image 44). It is not just young men who participate in this dress culture; a couple of young women have also

adopted this usually gendered as masculine kimono style (see image 45).



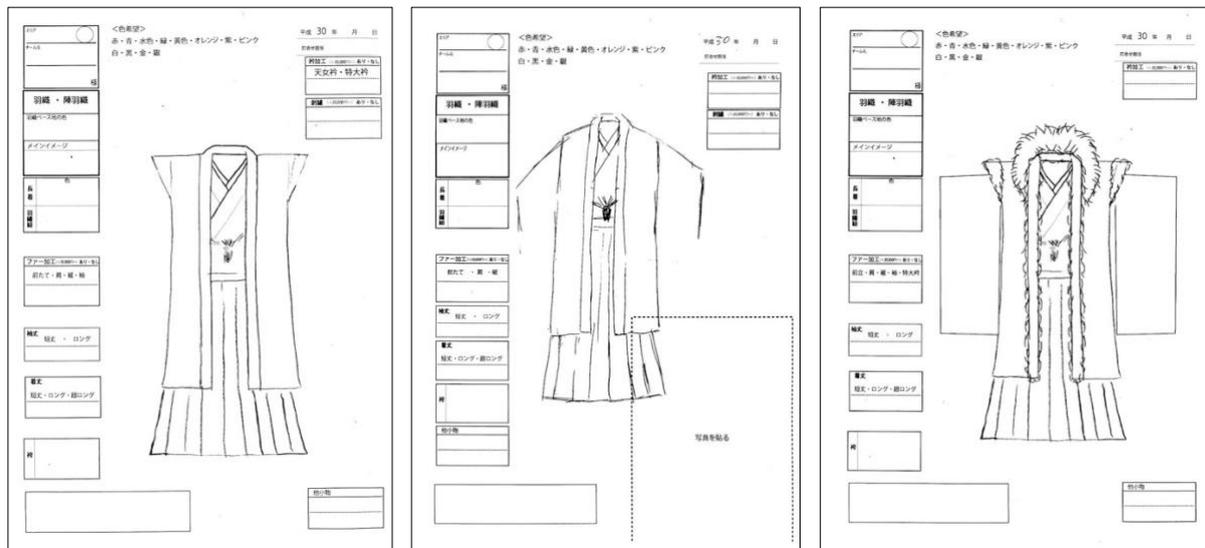
Images 42, 43, 44 from Miyabi Catalogue 2015: p. 39, 2015: p. 28, 2018: p. 47.



Image 45: The five young women dressing up in coordinated *hakama* ensembles, Miyabi Catalogue 2015, p. 59.

As the main provider of the *hade hakama*, Ikeda-san has created a whole operation around the customisation of coming-of-age dress. Customers are able to order personalised outfits based on three different prototypes (see image 46, 47 and 48). The first option consists

of a *hakama* combined with a *kataginu* vest. For the second option, the vest is replaced with a *haori* jacket. The third option uses the elements from option one as a base but includes *furisode* sleeves for maximum impact. As part of the customisation process, colours and patterns can be freely chosen by the customer, and additional elements such as fake fur or wings can be added. Similar personalisation options for fans, banners and flags equally exist. Customers are consequently provided with the possibility to completely modify their outfit based on their personal preferences and taste.



Images 46, 47 and 48: The three blueprints for the different customisable outfits by Miyabi.

The approach employed by Ikeda-san and her customers illustrate an alternative attitude towards men's kimono; *hakama* and *haori* are not conceptualised as ready-made garments which are already completed and simply purchased or rented. Rather, they are framed as items of clothing which are made from scratch. This results in the possibility of customisation and personalisation. Young adults are able to adjust many aspects and consequently strongly influence the final design. Their form of dress can reflect a variety of personal inclinations and parts of their identity; just like in the case of *Kin-san* and *Gin-san* who took the theme of the ceremony's venue as an inspiration to envision their kimono design, or the *Rainbow King* who aimed for a visualisation of his nickname, young adults are able to engage in creative self-expression through dress. The final look of the garment is in this regard not bound to or constrained by any rules or conventions, as long as the artisan is able to produce the desired garment. This approach stands in stark contrast to the formal men's

kimono ensembles and also suits which pursue a more uniform and conservative practice and impression. Rather than stage an 'appropriate' performance of a young adult however, individuals adopting the *hade hakama* are guided by their personal taste and aim to express their individuality in a less restrictive manner.

This practice is also sustained through the practice of young adults commonly paying for these costumes out of their own pockets. They naturally do not come cheap; the most basic modifiable option starts at a rental price of around ¥150,000 (approximately £950) and the most elaborate one at ¥300,000 (approximately £1900). Ikeda-san told me that many young adults regard the possibility to customise their coming-of-age dress as a motivation to work hard to earn the money by themselves, however; many of her customers stem from a working-class background and commonly started working after graduating from high school at the age of eighteen. Their families often do not possess the financial means to cover the fees, nor would these young adults necessarily want to rely on their parents in this way. This approach is consequently different to young women from a middle-class background who are usually still enrolled at university at the age of twenty and consequently have limited time to acquire personal funds. As discussed in chapter five, their family often provides them with the money to cover the *furisode* rental fee. This results in a certain dependency particularly on mothers as the household managers with young women oftentimes adopting their guidance taste and apply it to their coming-of-age dress. The customers of Miyabi are more independent from such social restraints and can, hence, express themselves through dress in a less constrained manner. This has resulted in an 'over the top' and visually 'loud' aesthetic which does not observe social norms and conventions.

Individuals adopting the *hade hakama* style rather aim to stand out and get noticed by their peers for their eccentric dress. Attendees seek to envision the most extravagant and crazy costumes to become the talk of the town in this way resulting in a form of public spectacle focused on dress. According to anthropologist Ikuya Sato, the creation of a public spectacle is often underlined by the concept of *medatsu*, standing out (Sato 1991: 23-24, 27-3, see also Yoshinaga 2007). Practices and activities are modified with the aim of being noticed and gaining feedback from an audience. The main aim here is to gain attention, no matter whether this is positive or negative; shock and outrage are equally as valid as are praise and awe. This is one of the main principles of the *hade hakama* style which celebrates over-the-top adornment and flashiness which by some is labelled as 'bad taste'. This sentiment of boldness

is pushed to new extremes year after year. Ikeda-san told me that many *kōhai* meet their *senpai* in front of the venue of the coming-of-age ceremony to present them with flowers and gifts. Witnessing the bold dress choices by their seniors, a certain dynamic has developed among young adults who aim to ‘out-do’ the previous year in terms of dress. The concept of *medatsu*, standing out, consequently guides many of the decisions made by young adults in the customisation of their coming-of-age dress. This practice arguably began with *Kin-san* and *Gin-san*, and has been sustained ever since.

This stance is also demonstrated through hair. The pompadour hairdo, which is also known as ‘Regent hairstyle’ (*rīzento sutairu*) in Japan (Voicu 2020), is a commonly adopted hairstyle (see images 49 and 50). Inspired by singer Elvis Presely and actor James Dean, Japanese rock’n’roll bands such as CAROL adopted the style in the 1960s and 70s and made it popular among a youth demographic (Nagae 2009). To achieve the look, one’s top hair is brushed up and backwards, with products such as wax used to keep the hair in shape. Treatments such as chemical perm can additionally be applied to add extra volume to the top hair. Many young adults temporarily dye their hair to add colour. While these styles are regarded as ‘vulgar’ by conservatively minded social commentators, young adults include hair styling into the playful and creative practices employed to stand out among their peers.



Images 49 and 50 from Miyabi Catalogue 2017: p. 60, 2018: p. 25.

The style consequently challenges the notion of ‘conspicuous inconspicuousness’, the ability to dress elegantly yet unobtrusively, which is, as discussed in chapter three, a major principle of men’s formal dress. The *hade hakama* style celebrates over-the-top adornment, artificiality and flashiness. The question whether the style is ‘appropriate’ is not of importance here; young adults rather aim to express themselves freely and autonomously to stand out among their peers. Unconventional hairstyles such as the pompadour are certainly not considered appropriate for formal and ceremonial occasions but precisely therefore guarantee a certain level of focused attention. Embracing this fashion demonstrates the different stance of these young adults who aim to celebrate their coming-of-age in their own terms.

This sentiment is not just expressed by dress, but equally through the young adults’ behaviour on the day. Some groups include their arrival at the venue of the ceremony in their coming-of-age performance for example. Cars are customised to guarantee an eye-catching entry, with bold colours and flashy accessories, such as fans and banners, attached (Ikeda personal interview 2018). The vehicles are parked in prominent spots for the other attendees to observe. The area in front of the ceremony’s venue becomes a spot for gatherings and meetings with friends, which occasionally results in sessions during which young adults express their enjoyment through spontaneous outbursts of dancing and singing. This practice can be regarded as another opportunity to demonstrate an individual approach to the celebration, with these young adults following their own concept of enjoyment to celebrate the day in a way that resonates with them. This attitude differs to a great extent from the emphasis on appropriateness and suitability, as well as focus on behaving like a ‘proper’ adult which is prioritised through the normative discourses introduced earlier.

These young adults consequently do not aspire to perform manhood which is guided by notions of becoming a ‘proper’ *shakaijin*. They rather aim for a version of bold and daring masculinity. This sentiment is visible in the photographs taken of young adults on the day. As illustrated in image 51, young men often straighten their backs and push their chest forward to create a confident and self-assured impression. Some individuals take a squatting position and widen their shoulders. A stern facial expression with a gaze fixated on the camera is additionally often part of this performance. These young adults consequently aim for a slightly threatening and intimidating posture, performing a specific version of bold manhood associated with working-class subcultures such as *bōsōzoku* motorcycle gangs of the 1960s and 70s (see image 52). This greatly diverges from the images of young men circulated as part of

the coming-of-age suit campaigns discussed in chapter three. These campaigns present a version of conservative middle-class manhood which is strongly valued and influenced by the corporate workspace. The images circulated as part of *hade hakama* style on the other hand depict a working-class masculinity guided by notions of brazen gaudiness and bold manhood.



Image 51 from Miyabi Catalogue 2018, p. 31.



Image 52: Picture of a *bōsōzoku* motorcycle gang taken by Masayuki Yoshinaga (2007).

The visualisation of camaraderie and companionship is another important aspect of the *hade hakama* style. Outfits are additionally often coordinated in accordance with the other members of one's social circle (Ikeda personal interview 2018). Many individuals wear similar, or even identical, kimono ensembles with a clear design underlying all items of dress. It is consequently easy to identify the affiliated group of an individual, as well as distinguish groups from one another. Just like *Kin-san* and *Gin-san* who communicated their friendship and childhood bond, the main intention is to nonverbally communicate allegiance and camaraderie through dress. The personalisation and display of props are also popular exercises which follow this principle. Folding fans, flags and large-sized banners are customised in creative ways to visualise group membership (see image 53 and 54). Besides the members' individual names, the group's hometown is often displayed in large letters on the front of these items. The group in image 53 displays a black banner with red and golden writing of the name 'Nuna Yoshida', a suburban district of Kitakyūshū for example. The writing is followed by the full names of all twelve members of the group. This practice visually communicates and manifests belonging and attachment to a regional area. One's hometown and the bonds which were established there are proudly presented in this way.



Images 53 and 54 from Miyabi Catalogue 2015: p. 34, 2018: p. 33.

Locality in general is of immense importance to notions of suburban working-class

masculinity. Friendships often form based on geographical proximity of one's 'hometown' (*jimoto* in Japanese). Social groups are established as early as elementary school, and often continue through middle to high school. According to Akira Nagae, picking fights with groups from neighbouring schools play an important part in suburban working-class identity formation during this time (2009). These practices strengthen the sense of belonging to one's *jimoto*. This is done with the aim to protect the group's place of origin and create a sense of ownership over the marked geographical landscape (Nanba 2007a: 206). The exercise of creating personalised banners and fans to display their hometown can be read in a similar manner; young adults take a sense of pride of belonging to their *jimoto* and claim a sense of ownership over their hometown in this way. Coming-of-age dress consequently assists young adults to boldly visualise and communicate a form of belonging to a social network which is rooted in geographical proximity.

#### Dressing Like a Courtesan: The *oiran kitsuke*

An alternative *furisode* style became popular around the same time when the *hade hakama* emerged. Different to the *koten* and *mode* designs discussed in chapter two and four, this style is not based on the garment's pattern design. It is rather the *kitsuke* which is changed, resulting in a different fit of the *furisode*. As I have discussed in chapter two, kimono's *kitsuke* is strictly standardised in a contemporary setting. The idea of *the* kimono which is regarded as Japan's traditional costume is closely connected to the belief that there is only one 'right' way to fit and wear the garment. *Kitsuke* academies teach this 'proper' approach which is protected by strict rules and regulations. Diverging from this proposed way consequently invites discontent and can thus be read as a rebellious act.

Due to the nature of the garment, kimono can be fit in many different ways. One of such ways is the shortening of the lower section of the garment to resemble a mini skirt. This style has been worn by attendees of the coming-of-age ceremony in Kitakyūshū (see image 55 for an example). *Kimono Ageha* (Inforest, 2010-2013), a special coming-of-age issue of subcultural publication *Koakuma Ageha* (2005-, Inforest), distributed step-by-step instructions on how to achieve this fit on a regular basis in the early 2010s (2011, p. 66, 2012, pp. 46-49, 2013, p. 65, see image 56). Fitting the *furisode* in a mini skirt-style would naturally be frowned upon by conventional kimono experts, but the magazine encourages this approach. It is after

all a practice very familiar to the *gyaru* subculture; as mentioned in chapter four, *gyaru* girls were known for shortening the skirts of their school uniforms. They are consequently encouraged to apply a similar approach to kimono. As a delinquent formation, *gyaru* are used to bend rules and regulations in order to modify their dress, so it comes as no surprise that such an alternative kimono fit would equally appeal to them.



Image 55: A young women wearing a *furisode* fitted in the mini skirt style, Miyabi Catalogue 2017, p. 61.

Image 56: A *furisode* fitted in a mini skirt style, Kimono Ageha 2013, p. 65.

It was another type of *kitsuke* which gained a significant amount of popularity and made headlines in Japan. This style became known as the *oiran kitsuke* or *oiran* style (*oiran-fu kitsuke* or *oiran sutairu*). The name references the high-profile courtesans of the Edo period (1600-1868) who were known for their extravagant and fashionable dress and conduct. Similar to the dissemination of the mini skirt *kitsuke*, publications played a vital role in popularising the *oiran* style (Ikeda, Ohara personal interview 2018). Detailed Instructions on how to successfully achieve this alternative fit was published in every single issue of *Kimono Ageha* from 2010 to 2014 for example. In the *one-off* publication *Furisode egg* (Million Publishing, 2010), a special coming-of-age issue of *gyaru* magazine *egg*, the historic figure of the *oiran* was introduced as

followed: 'a prostitute of the highest rank in the red-light district of Yoshiwara. Nowadays, she would be the number one *sōpu-jō*<sup>7</sup>. The way these women wore their kimono gave the name to the *oiran*-style *kitsuke* (*yoshiwara yūkaku de i no takai yūjo no koto. ima de iu, no. 1 sōpu jō. sono josei ga kiteita kimono no kikonashi ga, ima dewa kitsuke-mei no oiran deshintō shichatta-tekina*, p. 96). This *furisode* style consequently imitates a perception of how Edo's courtesans wore their kimono. The garment is in this way bestowed with notions of sensuality and eroticism.

As I have discussed in chapter two, when it comes to the presentation in kimono, young women's sexuality is completely hidden from view. In relation to the exposure of skin, Dalby has noted: 'Napes are a primary erotic focus of the female body in Japan, fully the equivalent of the breasts in the West. The modern young Japanese Miss is not supposed to be an erotic being - she is expected to be shy, sweet, and cute. Thus, she is to wear her [kimono] collar demurely close to her nape' (2001: 197-198). This notion is challenged by the *oiran kitsuke* for which the collar of the kimono is opened and fixed in a way to expose the skin around one's shoulders and neck (see images 57, 58 and 59). While the collar was initially opened only slightly, the practice further developed over the years with some young women going as far as completely exposing their neck, shoulders and nape (Ikeda personal interview 2018). This practice is consequently at odds with the desired characteristics expressed through the standardised *kitsuke* which aims to hide potentially arousing areas of the body, such as the nape, from view. Besides the opening of the collar, the other key characteristic of this style is the placement of the obi. Different to the conventional *kitsuke* where the obi knot is placed on the back of the wearer, the knot is positioned at the front of the body for this style. This position consequently also challenges conventions in relation to obi tying.

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<sup>7</sup> *Sōpu-jō* is the term for a woman working in a '*sōpurando*' (from English 'soap land'). These women provide erotic massages for their male clientele, assisting them in climaxing at the end of the session.



Images 57, 58 and 59: Photographs from the Miyabi Catalogue 2010: p. 23, 2012: p. 4, 2017: p. 29.

Besides the *furisode's* fit and placement of obi, another point of reference to Edo period courtesans was the adopted hairstyle of some women. While a *mori-gami* type *gyaru* hairstyle is the most popular hairdo as part of this style, some young women also fixed their hair in a *date-hyogo* (image 60). The *date-hyogo* is an elaborate hairstyle which was invented and worn by courtesans of Yoshiwara, the pleasure district of the city of Edo (Watanabe 2013). Besides its characteristic shape, hair accessories play a symbolic role in the style. The amount of *kanzashi* hairpins and combs refers to a courtesan's rank for example; the general principle followed here is the more accessories she is wearing, the higher her position. Hairpins and combs made out of precious materials such as tortoise shell or ivory were often gifted to courtesans (Ohara personal Interview 2018). Men aimed to win the favour and affection of a courtesan in this way. For the courtesans, they were a means to demonstrate their popularity and desirability through the placement and display in their hair.



Images 60: Photographs from the Miyabi Catalogue 2010, p. 48.

By the eighteenth century, courtesans had reached an iconic status in society and were regarded as prominent figures of immense social interest (Stanley 2012). Their popularity was fuelled by an increased circulation of cultural products, such as *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints, popular fiction, and kabuki plays (Stanley 2012: 52). These products established the pleasure quarter of Yoshiwara as a frivolous space of amusement and leisure, with courtesans as the main actors in it. Particular dress preferences by the most popular courtesans frequently became circulated in this way, with women of the merchant class imitating their fashions.

One of these fashions was the placement of the knot of the obi in the front of the body, a practice which became popular with courtesans during the seventeenth century (de Becker 1971: 96-7, Watanabe 2013). Without the existence of a wide-spread convention, various ways of fixing the obi sash were in use during this time (Dalby 2001). Some commentators suggest that tying the knot in front of the body was a convention to symbolise marriage, with upper-class women following this practice to symbolise their marital status (Ohara personal interview 2018). Courtesans later appropriated this method, possibly to communicate a symbolic marriage to their customers for the night. This way of tying the obi also comes with the welcoming advantage of the courtesan being able to face the customer throughout the undressing process, adding a certain notion of sensuality in this way.

While conventionally not part of the discourse of coming-of-age kimono, the *oiran*

*kitsuke* is of particular popularity with present-day hostesses. The community of young women working in '*kyaba-kura*' (an amalgamation of the words *kyabarē*, 'cabaret', and *kurabu*, 'club') is regarded as a subcultural formation and extension of the *gyaru* subcultural identity (Kawamura 2012: 85). The first *kyaba-kura* named 'Shinjuku Cats' opened in 1984 in the Tokyo district of Kabukichō (Miura and Yanauchi 2008). Young women in their late teens and early twenties largely inexperienced in the nightlife sector were hired as bar hostesses, serving drinks while entertaining the male clientele through conversation and drinking games. The young women working in these establishments came to be called *kyaba-jō* (literally 'miss cabaret') over the years. The establishment turned out to be so successful that many imitated the concept, with *kyaba-kura* appearing all over the country.

These establishments continue to be a stable element of Japan's nightlife scene in contemporary times. Anthropologist Anne Allison who, as part of her research, worked in a Tokyo hostess club for four years, describes the four main characteristics of the offered services as following: '[T]he hostess must be, or act like, a woman; the hostess must treat the customer as a superior and tend to his various desires; the service, while alluding to sex, cannot proceed to genital penetration or oral sex; and the service is conducted primarily at the level of conversation (1994: 7-8). In the documentary film *A Great Happiness Space* (2008), a *kyaba-kura* staff member working in Osaka describes her main occupation in a similar vein as 'help[ing] the customers to forget how tired they are, [to] let them dream'. Sexual encounters between the hostess and client are consequently potentially fantasised of, but not officially offered as part of the establishment's services<sup>8</sup>.

Allison goes even further and argues that, within the setting of the *kyaba-kura*, the main point of focus are not the women and the potential to have sex with them; it is the men and their own sexuality (1994). Sexually flirtatious and teasing comments are used by both the hostesses and customers to not necessarily allude to a sexual encounter, but rather to ultimately foster the relationship the male customer has to himself. Allison therefore concludes: 'In this sense, the sexuality is masturbatory; the erotic object is not the woman but the man, and the female is just a device to enhance the male's self-image [...] In a hostess club a man relies on the hostess to reflect an image that flatters him' (1994: 182-3). For women working in a *kyaba-kura*, this, according to Allison, means that they need to possess two

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<sup>8</sup> Former *kyaba-jō* Akemi Tsukino states in her confessional autobiography that many of the women nevertheless do end up sleeping with their customers, however (2009).

qualities: one, the willingness to create and maintain a good reflection of the customer, and, two, the willingness to accept the role of the subordinate member in a relationship with a man (1994: 183). The *kyaba-kura* is a space in which men can act as obnoxious and self-centred as they like; they are allowed to drink and smoke without control and without a care for their environment (Miura and Yanauchi 2008, see also Marx 2009). No matter how much they let themselves go, the hostesses are required to treat them like kings. Customers profoundly value this space as, from their perspective, women are less opinionated, liberated and 'needy' than they are in contemporary times. Hostesses do not necessarily aim to challenge these assessments as they are largely comfortable with traditional gender roles and practices (Miura and Yanauchi 2008).

Dress in general holds a very important function in the culture of *kyaba-kura*. Dress up parties are often staged around special occasions such as hostesses' birthdays and graduations, as well as cultural events such as New Year's Day and *obake no hi* (Ohara personal interview 2018). To inspire women working in the hostess profession, *Koakuma Ageha*, a publication which is regarded as the 'textbook of *kyaba-jō*' (Miyadai 2010), frequently features costume ideas and inspirations. In 2008, the publication included an off-shoulder *yukata* style as a suggestion for the '*yukata day*'<sup>9</sup> of a *kyaba-kura*. Some hostesses have worn this style at other occasions as well. When Japan's 'number one hostess' Mon Ryo graduated from her position at Osaka's Club MON in 2017, she wore a kimono fitted in the *oiran kitsuke* on the promotional posters of the event for example (see image 61). These examples demonstrate the popularity of the *oiran kitsuke* with present-day *kyaba-jō*.

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<sup>9</sup> *Yukata* are light kimono which young women often wear to nightly firework festivals in the summer. Some *kyaba-kura* stage their own *yukata* events.



Image 61: Promotional poster for the graduation event of ‘Japan’s number one’ hostess Mon Ryo held at Club MON in Kita-Shinchi, Osaka in 2017. Image taken from Mon Ryo’s Instagram.

The way to fit the kimono in the *oiran* style is based on the distinctive dress style which women working in the hostess profession have established over the years. *Kyaba-jō* commonly use items of dress in a conscious way to create a ‘feminine’ body; tight outfits ideally show off long legs, a small waist and a large chest (Kawamura 2012: 88). Make-up and hairstyles are similarly used to create a small and ‘pretty’ face. Sōichirō Matsutani has argued that the focus on clothing, hair and make-up stems from the fact that ‘femininity’ and ‘good looks’, besides skilled communication abilities, are part of the vital resources young women in the hostess profession need to learn to cultivate to be successful in their job (2012: 297).

Scholar Aya Kitamura has argued that the fashion style and beauty practices established by the hostess, while not necessarily crossing boundaries in terms of gender, deliberately play with gender norms and expectations through a conscious overuse and exaggeration of what is considered ‘feminine’ (2017: 119, 122). This sentiment is captured in a specific word coined by the subculture: *moru* (literally ‘to exaggerate’). The term captures an idea of exaggeration particularly when it comes to the application of make-up and hairstyling products. The symbolic hairstyle of *kyaba-jō*, the *mori-gami*, embodies these characteristics, with the main aim being to volumise one’s hair to immeasurable heights for example. The make-up practice of *deka-me* (literally ‘large eyes’) captures a similar sentiment of going to extremes, with

beauty products such as eyeshadow, eyeliner, artificial lashes and contact lenses used to create the impression of large eyes (Kawamura 2012: 89, Matsutani 2012: 293). These practices consequently challenge social expectation and beauty norms of femininity and womanhood based on demureness and containment. Similar to the *hade hakama*, the *kyaba-jō* style takes the opposite route and celebrates artificiality and deception through extravagance of dress. These sentiments are applied to kimono to create an ensemble which playfully engages with notions of sensuality and eroticism.

This focus on sensuality of the *oiran kitsuke* is illustrated in Kōda Kumi's music video to *Aishō* (2007). Kōda is considered an idol and trendsetter for the *gyaru* and *kyaba-jō* community with many young women imitating her dress style (Aoyagi and Min Yuen 2016, Sakai 2009). The singer has maintained an image of self-empowerment and independence throughout her career, defining her womanhood in complex and ambiguous ways. By her fans, she is regarded as a woman who takes her sexuality into her own hands, appealing to both a female and male gaze in an assertive and empowering way (Aoyagi and Min Yuen 2016: 105-106, Watanabe 2011: 67-71).

When she wore a kimono fitted in the *oiran kitsuke* in the music video to *Aishō*, some young adults were inspired to adopt the style to their coming-of-age celebration. Endo Ayako who worked at a hostess club in Fukushima disclosed that Kōda influenced her decision to dress in the *oiran* style for her coming-of-age ceremony in 2007 for example: 'The family of one of my clients owns a kimono shop so I rented [my *furisode* from them]. Kōda Kumi dressed up as an *oiran* in her music video to *Aishō* so I imitated [her]' (*okyakusan ni jikka ga gofukuten no kata ga ite rentaru shite kureta no. kōda kumi ga 'aishō' no PV de oiran ni fun shiteta kara mane shita yo, Kimono Ageha* 2011, p. 82). It can consequently be assumed that a significant number of young women adopted the style because of Kōda.

A closer look at the music video demonstrated the ambiguous stance of the *oiran* style between self-expression and self-objectification. The video is set in a traditional Japanese house equipped with *tatami* mats and *shōji* room dividers. The setting consequently evokes a sentiment of the past. The interior references the style of high-class brothels of the Edo period. Kōda is dressed in a multi-layered kimono ensemble, with the knot of her golden obi tied and placed at the front of her body (see image 62). The collars of the different layers are not closed in a conventional manner, but are slightly open to expose her neck and collarbones. This is the style she wears in most shots of the music video, with even the obi she wears under the main

kimono layer tied at the front of her body.



Image 62: Still from Kōda Kumi's music video to *Aishō* (2007).

In one of the main scenes of the video, Kōda starts undressing herself upon entering one of the rooms. She sheds layer upon layer of her kimono until she only wears a white *kosode* undergarment held together by a narrow red sash. The visual emphasis throughout this process is put on the singer's neck and shoulders, with close-up shots featuring the back of her neck, as well as her shoulders and collarbones. The camera shifts between different foci and uses blurriness and other softening techniques to guide the viewer's gaze to different parts of the singer's body. While she undresses, Kōda does not look into the camera but rather remains rather still, with her eyes half shut and her mouth slightly open.

Kōda plays with the idea of dressing and undressing, navigating the gaze of the viewer which is placed upon her in different, but always ultimately supervising ways. While it could be argued that this scene casts Kōda in a more passive position submitting to the 'male gaze' (Mulvey 1989), the deliberate use of blurring techniques and consequent guidance of the gaze evokes the sentiment that the singer nevertheless stays in control throughout these shots. Kōda can be regarded as deliberately acting out a scene for the camera which she is very much aware of. This sentiment is strengthened through the use of cut-in scenes during which the singer faces the viewer in a very direct and confronting way, not shying away from the

attention she has drawn to herself and her body. She consequently can be regarded as staying in control, deliberately playing with the gaze of the viewer to stimulate erotic fantasies and desires. The scene can be read in different ways, however, and demonstrates somewhat of an ambiguous position between empowered self-expression and desire to cater towards a 'male gaze'.

This ambiguity is also present in the song's lyrics. On one hand, scholar Yuki Watanabe has argued that Kōda, through her lyrical compositions, often suggests that a woman's happiness is dependent on that of her man (Watanabe 2011: 73). Efforts to improve one's outer appearance, such as dieting and dressing up, are classified as only meaningful when, as a result, appreciation and approval is gained from one's significant other. This sentiment is also communicated through the lyrics of *Aishō*. Throughout the lyrics, Kōda uses '*watashi*' for herself, while her lover is referred to as '*anata*'. The use of these words indicates a traditional-minded outlook, with '*watashi*' being neutral but more commonly used by women. '*Anata*' on the other hand references a lover which is clearly identifiable as male. Throughout the lyrics, Kōda is narrated in a somewhat more dependent position, focusing on her desperation and longing for her man to join her during a lonely night:

*I'm sure no one will understand  
My [watashi] and your [anata] deep love [...]  
I will drown deeply  
in your love again*

*darenimo kitto wakaranaidarou  
watashi to anata no fukai ai wo [...]  
anata no ai ni mata  
fukaku oborete shimatteiku*

Besides this conventional gendered depiction of a female individual waiting for the return of her male lover, a very sexual and erotic tendency is on the other hand expressed through the lyrics. This sentiment is dominant in the song's chorus:

*I want to merge [with you], be buried in your heartbeat*

*Hold me so tight that I won't be able to go to sleep*

*Forgive me*

*[Our] bodies intermingle*

*Crawling tongues*

*Call me*

*Call me more ...*

*majiri aitai anata no kodō ni umore*

*nemurenai hodo gyutto dakishimete*

*yurushite iku karada to karada majiwaru*

*shita wo hawase*

*watashi wo yonde*

*motto yonde*

The portrayal of a sexual encounter between the two lovers, possibly a fantasy of the female individual during this lonely night, is narrated very straightforwardly in this part of the lyrics. The Japanese language can be incredibly vague and unspecific, so this display of straightforwardness is rather unconventional in a way, particularly when used by a female speaker. It therefore becomes clear why Kumi Koda is so popular among the *gyaru* subculture; on one hand, the community is regarded as being very liberal in regards to their own sexuality and desires, exemplified by the practice of openly talking about intimate affairs and encounters (Kawamura 2012: 62-63). On the other hand, however, and this is particularly well researched in regards to the *kyaba-jō* community, many women equally commit to a more conservative idea of male and female gender roles (Miura and Yanauchi 2008). Men are regarded and expected to be the dominating force in a relationship while women play the more submissive part in this way.

This once again demonstrates the ambiguity between self-expression and self-objectification which is part of the *oiran kitsuke*. Women working in the hostess profession have argued that their style and fashions, such as the *oiran kitsuke*, do not necessarily aim for approval from a male gaze; they are, on the contrary, rather concerned with question of what women actually like and want to wear (Matsutani 2012: 298). Hiroshi Aoyagi and Shu Min Yuen have equally argued that the style created by members of the *kyaba-jō* subculture is tied to

the determination and focus of these young women to express themselves freely and autonomously (2016). These fashions therefore symbolically communicate a form of self-empowerment and liberation from conventional gender norms surrounding the ideal of a 'proper' young woman.

Nevertheless, the *oiran kitsuke* can similarly be read as assisting a form of self-objectification. Scholars such as Alexandra Hambleton have argued that female sexuality is monitored and manipulated in contemporary Japan: '[W]omen's desires are created, constructed and manipulated for the benefit of the capitalist state. The mainstream media have to some degree hijacked women's sexuality, repackaged it and marketed it to female consumers. This sexuality can then be "correctly" consumed within clear demarcated "safe" boundaries that do not threaten to subvert the status quo' (2012: 126-127). Read this way, the *oiran kitsuke* does not challenge the status quo but rather supports the continued objectification of women. Women are cast as mistresses who ultimately serve men to satisfy their sexual desires. The relationship between men and women is not cast as equal, but rather as one of dependence and inequality.

The *oiran kitsuke* therefore balances a fine line between provocative self-expression and precarious self-objectification. The idealised image of a young woman at her coming-of-age is one of an innocent, demure and cheerful individual who diligently follows established conventions when it comes to dress, presentation and conduct. An appearance referencing the idealised image of a samurai daughter, the *Yamato Nadeshiko*, is aimed for. The *oiran kitsuke*, and the dress style which has evolved around it, does provide young women with an alternative to this model. *Oiran* were regarded as fashion leaders of their generation who inspired a wide range of dress practices (Dalby 2001, Stanley 2012). Young women similarly aim to be a trend setter rather than follower by adopting the controversial but fashionable *oiran kitsuke*. Sex work on the other hand has for a long time raised questions of the agency and self-expression of women (see Jaggar 1994). Arguably even today, young women born into a lower-class environment might not have a choice but are rather led into a certain working position simply to be able to sustain themselves and their families. It would be wrong to completely dismiss their quest for agency, self-expression and choice, however.

I would consequently argue that the *oiran* style provides young women with an alternative to the normative model of femininity. It challenges the assumption that there is just one way to fit kimono and, in this way, widens the possibility of choice. Following Aoyagi

and Yuen's conceptualisation of *kyaba-jō* dress (2016), the *oiran kitsuke* can consequently be framed as an empowering vehicle for the expression and negotiation of identity.

### The othering of alternative styles by conservative commentators

So far, I have demonstrated how the *hade hakama* and *oiran kitsuke* challenge established conventions not just in relation to coming-of-age dress, but also young adult masculinity and femininity. The adaptation of one of these forms of dress can consequently be read as rebellious acts which promote divergent thoughts and conduct. It was therefore possibly only a question of time until these dress practices would gain wide-spread attention. In 2013, a user on 2channel, a popular online discussion website, shared photographs of Kitakyūshū's young adults dressed in the *hade hakama* and *oiran kitsuke* on the forum (Ikeda personal interview 2018). The post quickly gained a lot of attention with users sharing their varied opinions on the style. A significant amount of these comments was rather ill-spirited and mean, labelling the attendees dress practices as 'stupid' and 'immature'. Several media outlets aimed to get in touch with Ikeda-san on the following day, requesting interviews to inquire about the flamboyant dress culture surrounding the coming-of-age day in Kitakyūshū. Since then, Kitakyūshū's coming-of-age celebration is featured every year on national morning television programmes.

In 2018, a significant percentage of the overall coming-of-age day footage of Fuji Television's *Mezamashi Terebi* consisted of young adults wearing the flamboyant styles for example. The dress of men and women was introduced with specially made graphics as well (image 63). The outfits of young men were described as consisting of a *mon-tsuki hakama* with *tasuki*<sup>10</sup>, with customised folding fans and banners utilised to display one's name and hometown. The coordination of the overall design in accordance with acquaintances from one's hometown, such as friends from middle school, was also referred to as a significant element of the style. The dress for young women on the other hand was described as featuring a flashy *furisode* as the main item of clothing, as well as hair set in the *gyaru morigami* hairstyle. The visuals and commentary particularly focused on the divergent characteristics of the style, pointing out the differences to conventional coming-of-age kimono ensembles.

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<sup>10</sup> *Tasuki* is the cord used to tuck up the sleeves of a kimono.



Image 63: Fuji Television's *Mezamashi Terebi*, part of the *nihon ichi! hadena seijin-shiki* segment aired on January 8.

A process of othering is consequently taking place through this reportage. Lajos L. Brons has defined othering as ‘the construction and identification of the self or in-group and the other or out-group in mutual, unequal opposition by attributing relative inferiority and/or radical alienness to the other/out-group’ (2015). This process is visible in the commentary which contrasts women’s flashy *furisode* style with the practices surrounding the *koten* design, as well as the *hade hakama* with a conservative men’s kimono style. The narration administers ‘othering’ by mainly focusing on the ‘alien’ and ‘foreign’ elements of the outfits from Kitakyūshū, placing the *hade* and the conventional style in an antagonistic relationship. This is also demonstrated by the account of Ikeda-san. The seamstress told me that she always regarded the style requested by the young men and women in Kitakyūshū as the norm. It was only through feedback from the outside, such as the comments on the message boards, as well as through the attention brought to the ‘divergent’ style by the national media reportage that made her question and reconsider her way of thinking about the garments.

While It can consequently be argued that a form of othering is taking place through certain elements, other parts of the reportage aim to include the style in the normative discourse surrounding young adulthood. One of the segments used on *Mezamashi Terebi* focused on the difference between the attendee’s ceremonial and everyday appearances for

example. Five young adults, three men and two women dressed in the *hade hakama* and *oiran kitsuke* were introduced as part of this section. After covering their outfits in great detail, the young adults' coming-of-age day appearance was contrasted with images and information of their everyday lives. This usually included the acknowledgement of the individual's employment status. The first young man, Honda Rinnosuke, was introduced in the following way for example: 'Although appearing certainly scary on the outside, [Honda] is actually a very good-looking man in real life!' (*gaiken wa totemo kowa-sō ni miemasuga, fudan no sugata ga [...] sawayaka ikemen*, Fuji Television 2018). The young man's appearance on the coming-of-age day is framed as 'scary' and, hence, 'unpleasant' through the commentary. This statement was contrasted with an image of a 'good-looking' young man which was described in a more pleasant manner. The narrator then mentioned the fact that Honda had been working for an esteemed business organisation since the age of eighteen, having saved up money over a period of six months to be able to cover the cost of the lavish coming-of-age outfit from his own money. A similar narration surrounded all interviews; the two other young men were similarly introduced as office workers, while the two female participants were defined as an employee of a domestic airline company, with the accompanying picture showing her dressed in the airline's uniform, as well as a vocation school student aiming to become a beautician. The information that all of them paid for their outfits out of their own pockets was prominently discussed.

This narration consequently includes these individuals into the previously discussed discourse of 'proper' adulthood embodied by the social figure of the *shakaijin*. The participants are characterised not as irresponsible children, but rather as responsible members of society. This is proved through their employment status and the inclusion of the information that most of them work for a respectable company. The referral to their occupations in the reportage is consequently used to reveal their 'true self' outside of the festivities. By including a beauty student, the programme additionally creates a link between the young woman's occupational aspirations and her over-the-top fashion style on the coming-of-age day. The purpose of the contrasting method used here can therefore be regarded as serving to reassure the audience that these young adults are not trouble makers or social outcasts, but rather mature and sensible members of society who are having a bit of fun on this festive day. Hence, the young adults are framed as individuals who take their commitment to being responsible adults of Japanese society very seriously. The reportage consequently downplays the rebellious aspect

of the style, potentially with the aim to minimise any divergent thinking and conduct. Young adults are not directly discouraged from adopting the *hade hakama* and *oiran kitsuke*, however.

A more radical approach was evident in the discussion of the style in some other media. In 2014, an article in the weekly news publication *Shūkan Bunshun* investigated the popularity and origins of the ‘new trend’ (*shin-ryūkō*) of the *oiran kitsuke*. The article identifies the particular features of the style as consisting of a ‘super flashy *furisode* kimono’ (*do-hadena furisode*) with members of the ‘gyaru girls crowd’ (*gyaru shūdan*) exposing their shoulders and nape as part of this style. The article condemns young women for doing so by pointing out that high-class courtesans did in fact *not* expose their skin in this way. This specific narration implies that these young women are, in a way, ‘doing the style wrong’. Japanese literature scholar Nakajima Takashi additionally contributes his point of view in the article: ‘While high-class courtesans did indeed sell sex, they were also regarded as fashion leaders, and it was not uncommon for ordinary women to imitate their dress style. On top of that, they were educated individuals, studying *haiku* poetry, tea ceremony and literary classics such as “The Tale of Genji”’ (*oiran wa sei woutte itaga, fashoonrīdāde mo ari, kanojotachi no fukusō wo ippan no josei ga maneru koto mo sukunakunakatta. shikamo, kanojotachi wa haiku ya sadō, “genjimonogatari” nado no koten made manandeita kyōyō hito demo attanodesu*). Towards the end of the article, the author addresses the young women directly, proposing that: ‘Appearance is not everything, please also acquire cultural education’ (*mitekure dakedenaku, kyōyō mo mi ni tsukenakereba ne*). This sentence illustrates the dismissive and scornful attitude held by the author towards individuals adopting the style. They suggest that, rather than being concerned with how they look, these young women should invest some effort into learning about the ‘proper’ origins and formation of courtesans’ dress. The article hence strongly advises these young adults to discontinue with the ‘distasteful’ and ‘embarrassing’ practice of exposing their shoulders, and put more effort into their education and literacy which they clearly lack.

Young women are in this way stigmatised for adopting the *oiran kitsuke*. It is particularly the exposure of skin which seems to trigger exaggerated reactions and harsh assessments. Andrew Reilly has discussed how women more so than men are commonly stigmatised for exposing skin and dressing in a, perceived as, ‘sexually suggestive’ and, therefore, ‘immodest’

manner (2019c). Dress scholar Jennifer Craik who has investigated the relationship between clothing and bodies states that within most modern societies, nudity is often the subject of immense controversy (1993). Due to reasons of acting as the site of sexual tension and conduct, the body must be disciplined to control sexual impulses (1993: 115). Sociologist Minako Saito has further discussed how young women and their style of dress have always been the target of harsh judgements from adults within Japanese society (2003). This is particularly true in relation to the 'indecent' exposure of skin, with Saito illustrating how conservatively minded commentators commonly speak dismissively of practices such as adoption of short skirts and visibility of underwear. From the perspective of these commentators, such practices are a clear sign of the young women's disarranged sexuality and sense of womanhood, leading to the conclusion that they must be 'stupid' and 'uneducated' (2013: 16-17). This stigmatisation is clearly sustained through the article; young women adopting the *oiran kitsuke* are considered as in need of proper education in manners and conduct, as well as Japanese history and culture. These individuals are consequently shamed for uncovering their shoulders and adding a sensual sentiment to their coming-of-age kimono.

While this kind of commentary is in no way justified, it should be acknowledged that an element of provocation is certainly part of the *oiran kitsuke*. This is notably evident in the application and display of impermanent decorations in the form of temporary tattoos. Young women visibly apply decorative motifs such as flowers or butterflies to the exposed skin. The style of the decorations resembles tattoos, or *irezumi*, which occupy a risky position in contemporary Japanese society. Due to the connection to organised crime organisations such as the yakuza, the government outlawed tattoos at the beginning of the Meiji period (Schadner 2010). This results in the continued connection of *irezumi* to the yakuza and consequent rare visibility of these decorations in the public sphere. The practice of openly displaying tattoos, even impermanent ones, consequently immensely challenges the generally expected code of conduct, not just in relation to kimono but dress in general.

As discussed in chapter five, a significant number of young women aim to largely adhere to social conventions. They consequently seek to avoid any attachment of their form of dress to the yakuza. This aspect was mentioned by my interviewees and is exemplified by Mako in the following comment:

"I think it is nice that there are many different [*furisode*] styles in general. But then

there is black, right? Black or purple. If you wear something like that to the coming-of-age ceremony ... I do not think that is appropriate. [These specific colours] are quite *yakuza*-like [*chotto gokudō, yakuza-ppoi kanji*] [...] I would definitely not wear black, [the colour] has a bad image. [The colours] red, yellow, or white [were part of my *furisode*, which I think is appropriate]. I chose them because they have a formal, settled feel to them, rather than a flashy [*hade*] one.”

This quote demonstrates that young adults are very aware of the link between certain styles and the *yakuza*, going as far as consciously aiming to avoid colours that reference organised crime gangs all together. Mako confirmed that she wears black and purple in her everyday life, but that it is in particular these colours which she refrains from wearing as part of kimono designs to not evoke any potentially negative sentiments.

The young woman additionally mentions a preference for kimono which have a formal and settled feel to them over a flashy and attention-grabbing design. This was a sentiment many of my interviewees expressed. Bold and showy styles were often associated with the celebration in Kitakyūshū which held a slightly negative connotation for some of the young women. This is hinted at in Mako’s comment when she mentioned that she would like for individuals to be aware of the setting of the occasion and decide on an appropriate kimono style. This point of view echoes some of the narratives related to the ‘ruined coming-of-age ceremonies’ discourse which frames young adults as immature and childish, and, in this way, not deserving of recognition as a *shakaijin* (Kobari 2005). Mako consequently indirectly expresses the opinion that she does not consider the *hade hakama* or *oiran kitsuke* as an appropriate way to dress for the coming-of-age ceremony. This demonstrates the slightly negative point of view a lot of people possess in relation to the *hade* dress style.

It is of course nothing new for extravagant dress styles to evoke disapproval and criticism, both worldwide and in a Japanese context. In the 1730s, a courtesan named Shigasaki became known for wearing wide obi which covered most of her torso for example (Bornoff 2002). This was a time when women in general preferred thin obi sashes, so Shigasaki’s preference quickly gained attention and became widespreadly known. With obi being among the most expensive items of a kimono ensemble, the courtesan displayed her wealth and affluence through this form of dress. This tendency did not go unnoticed by the ruling shogunate and their advisors. Senior councillor Tadakuni Mizuno for example noted that: ‘The

trend of frivolity and overindulgence has become extreme. If we could reverse it on this occasion and clean it up at once, all aspects of society would be rejuvenated' (Hur 2007: 277-78). As expressed in the quote, dress symbolised the levels of integrity of society and were regarded by the councillor as confirming the population's lack of decency and virtue. The shogunate consequently aimed to put both dress and people's common sense in order. This is a similar attitude employed by current-day commentators who regard dress as representative of an individual's mental state and level of education.

However, I believe that most young adults do not aim to actively provoke or disrespect social norms and conventions. On the coming-of-age day, they rather aim to express a sense of self through dress. This was illustrated on *Mezamashi Terebi* by a comment of Nishida Shōgo, an attendee of the coming-of-age ceremony, who stated that: 'This outfit is just for today. Tomorrow, it is back to work' (*kono kakkō wa tatta ichi-nichi dake. ashita wa shigoto da*, Fuji Television 2018). The young man consequently expresses the sentiment that on this extraordinary day, young adults intend to have a bit of fun through dress. Ikeda-san confirmed this sentiment by explaining that many of her customers regard the coming-of-age day not as an occasion to demonstrate their competence as an adult, but rather honour it as the last day of their childhood. They consequently celebrate the carefreeness of youth through dress on the day. Young adults from a working-class background are arguably already more embedded into adult society than their middle-class peers who at the time of the coming-of-age day are still in higher education and are just starting to look for full-time employment. Hence, rather than maliciously criticise the *hade* styles and shame young adults for adopting it, social commentators should regard it as a healthy embodiment of youth and expression of freedom.

This is also one of the arguments by sociologist Masayuki Yoshinaga who frames the practices of Japanese subcultures in a similar way (2007). Once an individual becomes an adult in a social and legal sense, meaning that they have a full-time job and start a family, they usually start to settle down and pursue a different lifestyle (Nagae 2009: 48, Sato 1991: 7, 157-177). Divergent practices usually remain limited to the time of one's youth where one possesses a greater sense of freedom from the realities that come with adult life. Aoyagi and Min Yuen have also illustrated how many women embracing subcultural styles move on from it in their early to mid-twenties (2016). The two scholars argue that taking on other social roles, like becoming a full-time employee or a parent changes perspectives and outlooks on personal preferences and presentation to the outside world (2016: 103). This does not mean that they

necessarily abandon their previously held values, but simply that perspectives change and priorities shift when individuals grow older. We should therefore provide them with the freedom to celebrate their coming-of-age in a way that resonates with them.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how young adults challenge previously established norms and conventions surrounding dress at the coming-of-age day. I explored how young men in the city of Kitakyūshū have created a kimono style which challenges notions of ‘conspicuous inconspicuousness’ (Vainshtein 2010). Rather than pursuing a form of dress which expresses elegance and grace in an understated manner, the *hade hakama* revolves around ideas of flashy, over-the-top aesthetics and adornments. The style is guided by the principle of *medatsu*, standing out, as well as working-class values of male camaraderie and belonging to a regional community. The style would consequently not be welcome at the workplace but provides young men with an opportunity to express themselves through dress.

I have further demonstrated how young women equally aim for an expression of the self through the adoption of the *oiran kitsuke*. A young woman at her coming-of-age is idealised as innocent, demure, cheerful and protective of established conventions in relation to presentation and dress. An appearance referencing the conduct of a samurai daughter, the *Yamato Nadeshiko*, is normatively aimed for through coming-of-age dress. The *oiran kitsuke*, and the dress style which has evolved around it, provides young women with an alternative to this model. Young women dress in a style inspired by the influential courtesans of the Edo period to add notions of sensuality and eroticism to their form of dress.

This has led to a certain tension, as some conservatively minded forces do not wish to see young adults dress in these ways. The mainstream media both ‘others’ the *hade* styles while also aiming to include the wearers into the discourse of proper coming-of-age adulthood. This is possibly done to negotiate the slightly negative perceptions of the style which might be persistent in the general population due to such discourses as the ‘ruined coming-of-age ceremonies’ (Kobari 2005). Other commentators take a different approach and shame young women for dressing in an ‘indecent’ style, outspokenly labelling them as ‘stupid’ and ‘uneducated’.

However, rather than necessarily aiming to destabilise normative values and practices, young adults in Kitakyūshū are celebrating the day in a *matsuri*-like manner, showcasing their

friendships, creativity, and ability to earn money through dress. Many of them honour the day as the last day of their childhood rather than regard it as a symbolic step towards adulthood. I consequently believe that the dress styles and practices provide young adults with an alternative to the established norm and can consequently be read as an empowering vehicle for the expression and negotiation of identity.

## Conclusion

This thesis aimed to extend the academic debate on kimono by discussing the garment in the particular context of the coming-of-age day. It has ultimately presented an understanding of kimono as a versatile garment which is used and shaped by individuals as a vehicle to negotiate different aspects of their cultural and gendered identities in complex ways.

I drew on dress studies, cultural studies, sociology and ritual studies to frame the findings within this thesis in relation to its actual context, as well as the academic discussion on it. While being able to sustain normative values and meanings, I have analysed how ritual specifically, and culture more generally, is strongly influenced by the many forces which shape and are shaped through it. This relationship is a reciprocal one in which humans actively create and mould culture and cultural identities, whilst at the same time understanding themselves through it. I sought to demonstrate how normative meanings, values, and expectations are negotiated as part of the everyday lived experience and practice of individuals, and how dress plays an important part in this.

I have consequently contributed to a wide variety of fields of study. I believe that the thesis' greatest contribution relates to the field of kimono and dress studies, and will outline this in the next section.

### Contributions to the academic study of kimono and dress

Regarded by many as Japan's national dress, kimono has always served as a site for negotiations and mediations in regards to cultural and national ideas, beliefs and sentiments, and is therefore an important cultural object to study. While being casted into a marginalised position during the later half of the twentieth century, the garment is believed to have had a revival in recent years. This rejuvenation is partly fuelled by a more playful attitude towards kimono which has developed in the last two decades, and one which is directly opposed to the more normative approach and attitude which dominated the post-war mindset. A wide variety of studies have focused on the kimono fashion networks whose members aim to express their personality and individuality, as well as group affiliation, through the consumption practices surrounding the garment (Assmann 2008, Cliffe 2013, 2017, Valk 2017, 2018). This lens has not yet been applied to dress at the coming-of-age celebration, however. It is rather Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni's study on the construction of gendered and cultural identities in modern Japan (1999) which sustains the perception of a *furisode* kimono as a traditional costume which

is static, fixed and immensely symbolic, pressing young women into one pre-set of 'traditional Japaneseness'. This ideal is constructed in opposition to that of young men who are demonstrating their rational and modern characteristic through the practice of dressing in suits for the celebration.

As I have demonstrated in chapters one, two and three, these notions continue to be influential in shaping the present-day perception of dress at the coming-of-age day. Parts of the mainstream media, and here particularly the reportage within newspapers, strongly assist the maintenance of the discourse of 'correct' and 'legitimate' forms of dress for the occasion. Coming-of-age dress is normatively gendered, with young women represented as wearing *furisode* ensembles, and young men described as wearing suit, shirt and tie combinations to the ceremonies. The big focus on women's dress illustrates the symbolic nature of a *furisode*-clad young woman who has come to represent the coming-of-age day on a national level.

This image is strongly attached to discourses of normative femininity. In chapter two, I demonstrated how the *koten*-patterned *furisode* is embedded into a *nihonjinron* narrative of 'traditional Japaneseness'. Design elements such as motifs, arrangements, and colours used as part of the pattern aim to project an idea of a long-lasting cultural heritage which needs to be preserved and appreciated. The *koten* design is in this way framed as the heart/soul of kimono and, hence, the original and 'true' expression of it. This 'kimono with a capital K' (Dalby 2001: 114) discourages ideas of fashion and aesthetic experiments. This idea is sustained through the standardised *kitsuke* which continues to be widely preserved by kimono professionals. A strong distinction between kimono experts or novices sustains a strict hierarchy between the two. Rather than shaping the garment in their own terms, young women are rather encouraged to adopt the idealised image of a *Yamato Nadeshiko* when dressed in a *koten*-style *furisode*, reproducing tame and graceful notions of middle-class femininity.

It is not just young women who have cultural expectations and norms laid onto them, however. In chapter two, I described how young men are equally to women encouraged to conform to normative ideas and values. For young men, it is particularly the idealised figure of the male *shakaijin*, based on the image of the post-war salaryman, which influences one's coming-of-age performance. Guided by the principle of 'conspicuous inconspicuousness' (Vainshtein 2010), young men need to put a lot of effort into creating an elegant and appropriate, yet seemingly unobtrusive appearance. The business suit is the item of dress which is singled out as the most appropriate garment in this regard, representing the modern

business environment like no other form of clothing. Values sustained in the modern workplace, such as commitment, maturity and confidence, underline the desired performance of young men in suits. Suit retailers additionally encourage young men to learn basic suit manners and etiquette, aiming to avoid notions of sloppiness and untidiness.

I also discussed the formal *hakama* and *haori* ensemble as part of this chapter. While largely neglected by the kimono industry due to a perception of not being profitable, male consumers are nowadays increasingly interested in wearing kimono to the coming-of-age celebration. This increase in interest is partly due to demands from young women who would like to see their partners in a similar dress style as that of their own. The style has witnessed an increase in popularity in recent years, with some parts of the industry slowly including men's kimono into their inventories.

In chapter four, I explored how many sectors of the kimono industry now position *furisode* as fashion. *Furisode* are framed as stylish *o-share* garments which are influenced by trends and fashions. Young women are encouraged to express their individuality by coordinating a *furisode* ensemble which resonates with their personal taste. Fun and lightheartedness, guided by notions of *asobigokoro* ('playful heart'), are consequently at the centre of this discourse. I further examined how the subcultural community of *gyaru* influenced the creation of alternative coming-of-age dress styles and practices as part of this chapter. The *mode* design, a *furisode* pattern incorporating bold and overly 'girly' design elements, is mainly based on the aesthetic preferences of the *gyaru* subculture. Members of the community are long used to personalising their dress through playful modifications, going as far as creatively adjusting elements of their school uniforms to produce a more personalised appearance. Being regarded as an important group of consumers throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, some sectors of the kimono industry started to adjust their business approach towards these young women. The creation of this new design led to a diversification of available *furisode* pattern styles, repositioning the *koten* design not as the norm, but rather as one option within a wide variety of styles. As a result, young women are presented with an increased amount of options when it comes to choosing a garment for the coming-of-age day.

In chapter five, I discussed the complex negotiation process underlying the selection of a specific garment for the coming-of-age ceremony. Young adults need to find a balance between self-expression and demonstrations of maturity through dress. They consciously and unconsciously respond to expectations from family and society while also aiming to express

individual agency and display their personality and taste. For young women from a middle-class background, mothers continue to play a significant role in this process through their provision of the financial means for the acquisition of a *furisode*. Young women negotiate this relationship in complex ways and employ different strategies to display the self in a variety of ways.

Finally, chapter six illustrated how different communities have been involved in the mediation in relation to the question of what constitutes ‘appropriate’ attire to wear on the coming-of-age day. I discussed the *hade hakama* and *oiran kitsuke* as part of this chapter, demonstrating how both styles counter normative discourses surrounding coming-of-age dress. The *hade hakama* communicates sentiments of bold masculinity and working-class camaraderie through its flashy and brazen aesthetics, challenging the principle of ‘conspicuous inconspicuousness’ of middle-class dress practices. The *oiran kitsuke* adds notions of sensuality and female sexuality to kimono, disturbing the image of a young woman at their coming-of-age as innocent and demure. While some social commentators have ‘othered’ these dress practices and condemn wearers for adopting these styles, young adults aim to celebrate their coming-of-age in a way which resonates with them. They do not let themselves be limited by social conventions and norms but rather express themselves through dress in creative and playful ways.

#### Future Directions

I believe that there are many potential directions for the research presented in this thesis to evolve. I see this thesis as the beginning of my research career, outlining, through every chapter, just some of the general aspects and perspectives on dress which I am particularly interested in. The small sample size of this research reduces the potential for generalisations to the whole population, so one of the first steps would be to generate more data to test the validity of my findings. Besides this general approach, there are some specific sections I would like to further develop.

One of them relates to the *hade* dress practices discussed in chapter six. When I interviewed Ikeda-san of kimono rental shop Miyabi during my fieldwork in 2018, the dressmaker kindly invited me to come back to witness the preparation and dressing process of participants at the coming-of-age day. I would like to take up this invitation and deepen my knowledge on the flamboyant dress practices popular in the city. This would include a

capturing of the preparation and dress process, as well as the finished outfits of the young adults through photographs. I would also like to generate contacts with the aim to interview young adults on the creative process behind the costumes; what are some of the influences and ideas their costume design is based on? What are they aiming for in terms of appearance? What do they like about outfits? I believe that this personal contact and account from the participants in Kitakyūshū would add value to the research which I started in part two of this dissertation.

Another section I would like to extend is the chapter on young men. There is commonly a much bigger focus on women when it comes to dress, with men's practices oftentimes overlooked. I would therefore like to conduct additional research into how dress for the coming-of-age day is presented in men's fashion magazines. Whilst I did begin to investigate dress for men at the coming-of-age day in chapter three, I believe that there is much more commercial material available than I was able to collect. To balance out the account of young women's lived experience of the coming-of-age day, I would like to conduct interviews and focus groups with young men to find out more about the process of choosing a suit and getting ready for the ceremony.

I consequently aim to build on my doctoral research to contribute to the academic discussions surrounding dress and kimono.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1 – TUoS Ethics Approval Confirmation Form



Downloaded: 16/08/2021  
Approved: 30/11/2017

Carolin Becke  
Registration number: 160102040  
School of East Asian Studies  
Programme: East Asian Studies

Dear Carolin

**PROJECT TITLE:** National Identity, Popular Culture and the Role of National Dress in Contemporary Japanese Society  
**APPLICATION:** Reference Number 016491

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 30/11/2017 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 016491 (form submission date: 31/10/2017); (expected project end date: 30/06/2018),
- Participant information sheet 1036310 version 3 (31/10/2017),
- Participant information sheet 1036309 version 2 (31/10/2017),
- Participant consent form 1036312 version 1 (17/10/2017),
- Participant consent form 1036311 version 1 (17/10/2017),

If during the course of the project you need to [deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation](#) please inform me since written approval will be required.

Your responsibilities in delivering this research project are set out at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely

Katherine Gallagher  
Ethics Administrator  
School of East Asian Studies

Please note the following responsibilities of the researcher in delivering the research project:

- The project must abide by the University's Research Ethics Policy:  
<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/rs/ethicsandintegrity/ethicspolicy/approval-procedure>
- The project must abide by the University's Good Research & Innovation Practices Policy:  
[https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly\\_fs/1.671066!/file/GRIPPolicy.pdf](https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.671066!/file/GRIPPolicy.pdf)
- The researcher must inform their supervisor (in the case of a student) or Ethics Administrator (in the case of a member of staff) of any significant changes to the project or the approved documentation.
- The researcher must comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data.
- The researcher is responsible for effectively managing the data collected both during and after the end of the project in line with best practice, and any relevant legislative, regulatory or contractual requirements.

**インタビューの質問□**

□

**成人式の準備について**

いつから準備をしましたか？

振袖はどのように手に入れましたか？

着物のレンタル店を訪ねましたか？

- ・どんな店でしたか？
- ・誰と訪ねましたか？

どんなように振袖を選べましたか？特に気になった色、模様、デザインがありましたか？

記念写真を撮られましたか？誰に送られましたか？

**成人式の日**

成人式はどこに行っていましたか？

成人式の流れを教えてください。

- ・何時起きましたか？
- ・ヘアやメイクはどこでやられていましたか？どんなヘアやメイクでしたか？
- ・着付けはどこで完成されていましたか？
- ・何時に成人式の場所に着きましたか？
- ・着いたらどんな雰囲気でしたか？
- ・式はどんな流れでしたか？

女性のはみんな振袖を着ましたか？特に人気な色、模様、スタイルを気づきましたか？男性はどうでしたか？酎ごく派手や目立つな振袖のスタイルや着こなす方がありましたか？

**成人式の後**

式が終わったら何をしましたか？

振袖がどうされましたか？

友達の成人式の写真を見たり見せたりしましたか？

**他の着物着た経験**

成人式の前、着物や浴衣を着た経験ありましたか？あったらとこで、何のために着ましたか？

着物についてどう思いますか？着るとどんな気持ちですか？

これからどんな為に着物を着ると思いますか？

## Appendix 3 – Example of an interview outline for professionals working in the kimono industry

### 『Kimono Hearts』 沖縄那覇店の稲永さんへの質問

稲永さんはどんなように着物レンタルの産業に入ったのでしょうか？

『KimonoHearts』は他の着物レンタル店とは何が違いますか？コンセプトはなんですか？

どのようにお店の広告されていますか？

振袖は1 2つのスタイルに分かれています。その1 2つのスタイルについてもっと教えてください。どのように確立されていましたか？

- ・レトロモダン ・ノスタルジック ・ネオ・ジャパネスク ・古典 ・舞姫古典
- ・息古典 ・平成花魁 ・グラマラス ・ロマンチ ・モードスタイル
- ・ゴシック ・フローラルフェミニン

オリジナル商品が製造されていますか？他のブランドの商品を在庫していますか？

お客様はどんなように振袖を選びますか？若い女性にとっては何が大事ですか？(値段、色、可愛さ)

普段ではどんな流れですか？お客様がいつ店に来ますか？

レンタル衣装代は大体いくらですか？

一人で来ますか？それとも両親や友達と来ますか？

店舗を訪ねる前にスタイルや振袖も選びましたか？

スタッフさんはどのようにアドバイスしますか？

特に人気なスタイルがありますか？人気な柄、模様、色がありますか？

お客様がどこから衣装のインスピレーションを受けていますか？

男性向けの衣装は？

京都と沖縄のお客様の違いがありますか？人気なスタイルが大体一緒ですか？それとも違いがありますか？

稲永さんが着物レンタルの産業に入ったから何か変わったと思いますか？着物の現在の社会的な立ち位置についてはどう思いますか？

研究情報の詳細

**プロジェクト名：現代日本の着物文化**

あなたは、研究プロジェクトに参加する機会を与えられています。あなたがプロジェクトに参加するかどうかを決定する前に、なぜこの研究が行われるのか、それがどのように進んでいくのか理解することが重要です。次の情報をよく読んで、必要に応じて他の人と話し合う時間を取ってください。

明確でないものがあつたり、さらに詳しい情報が必要な場合は、私 (Carolin) にたずねてください。あなたが参加するかどうか決めるために時間を取っていただいで構いません。

**プロジェクトの目的は何ですか？**

博士号の一環として、シェフィールド大学と立命館大学の現代日本における着物に関する6ヶ月間の研究プロジェクトを行っています。日本社会での着物の現代的な認識について、着物レンタル店のオーナー、スタッフ、顧客にインタビューする予定です。

**私は参加する必要がありますか？**

あなたが参加するかしないかは、あなた次第です。あなたが参加することを決定した場合は、この情報シートを手に入れて、他に同意書に署名するよう求められます。あなたはいつでもこのプロジェクトをやめる権利があります。あなたは、その理由を私 (Carolin) に伝える必要はありません。

**私が参加するとどうなりますか？**

私 (Carolin) からインタビューを受け、着物や着物のレンタルショップに関するあなたの経験について聞かれます。

インタビューには約30～45分かかります。あなたの許可をいただけた場合は、ヴォイスレコードに記録されます。

インタビュー中に理由を言わずに、質問に答えることを拒否することもできます。あなたの許可をいただけた場合は、プロジェクトであなたのフルネームを使用したいと思います。あなたのフルネームを使用したくない場合は、あなたの姓または名、あるいはニックネームを使用することができます。これについて議論してください。

**インタビュー中に取られたヴォイスレコードやメモをどうなりますか？**

ヴォイスレコードとメモは私 (Carolin) で分析され、私だけがアクセスできる保護されたスペースに保存されます。

研究結果は博士論文に書かれ、これから学術書を出版する予定です。

**詳細は下記にお問い合わせください**

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## Appendix 5 - Consent Form

研究プロジェクト名：現代日本の着物文化

研究者の名前：Carolyn Becke（ベッケ・キャロリン）

確認マーク✓を  
入れてください。

1. 上記の研究プロジェクトを説明する情報シートを読み、それに関して理解していることを認識して、プロジェクトに関して答える機会を得ました。
2. 自分の参加は自主的であり、何らかの理由与える必要もなく、いつでも辞退することが自由であることを理解します。さらに、質問に答えることを望まないなら、私は否定的なかたちで影響を受けることなく、それらに答えることを拒否することができます。
3. インタビュー中に生成されたデータは私（Carolyn）の今後の研究で使用される予定であることに同意します。
4. 上記の研究プロジェクトに参加することに同意します。

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参加者の名前

日付

署名

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主任研究員の名前

日付

署名