Transitioning to Modernity: Kimono and the Development of New Female Identities in Taishō Japan

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Moga in the streets of Tokyo, 1920s. *Asahi Shimbun*.

Introduction

Image 1: Cover design of Tokyo (*東京)* magazine, December 1924. By Sugiura Hisui 杉浦 非水 (1876-1965).

If we are to believe images like this 1924 cover of *Tokyo* magazine above (see image 1), the Taishō period (1912-1926) was a time of wealth and modernisation. What looks like a mother and daughter are walking side by side, dressed in Western style clothes and accessories, carrying packages. Perhaps they are walking up to the entrance of their house, with the pillar next to the little girl, and they seem to have purchased so many things that they could not carry everything themselves. A man in a double-breasted uniform with a cap is carrying the rest of the packages, and what appears to be his colleague is waiting in an automobile. In the distance, we see the silhouette of a house – not built in a Japanese style of architecture – with smoking chimneys. If it were not for the characters written on the cover, one might have mistaken it for an American magazine.

It was images like these that got me to wonder about the fashions of the 1920s in Japan: did the women suddenly all start wearing the 20s fashions popular in the West that I find so charming? But what about the kimono, another fashion I much admire?

As it turns out, as opposed to what the many images of women wearing Western style clothes would suggest, women of the Taishō period for the most part continued to wear kimono. However, given the status of kimono nowadays, it is easy to forget that it was once just

everyday wear. According to Hiroi Tazuko: “Nowadays there are almost no people who wear kimono on a daily basis. According to many people, kimono is not everyday clothing, but formal wear to dress up in for special occasions like graduation ceremonies and coming of age ceremonies, weddings, entrance ceremonies, and the New Year, and so on”.[1] This current-day view of kimono as ceremonial is, as will be described in the coming chapters, a result of conscious efforts to codify kimono as traditional during the Meiji period (1868-1912). Considering kimono as such colours our view of the garment that is essentially, as the name suggests, just a ‘thing to wear’ 着物 (*kimono*).

Although in reality there were few women wearing Western style clothes in everyday life during the Taishō period, one could still find many images of women in Western clothes. This figure became known as the *modan gaaru* (modern girl) or *moga* for short, and she generated many discussions. This ambiguous figure – from a progressive mother embracing modern times to a flirtatious young woman enjoying the new urban life – was not representative of a real group of women, but presented an icon. That most women wore kimono, however, does not have to mean that none of these women can be considered modern. After all, modernity can mean many different things to many different people. This thesis argues that the Taishō period was transitional, rather than suddenly modern, and the kimono of this period presented women with an opportunity to express a range of new identities, enabled by developments in society, the economy and the textile industry. It explores these changes brought about in society and the production and sales of kimono, as well as the perspectives on kimono as a garment and the role of women in society. The research question I have formulated is the following:

> How was kimono modernised in the Taishō period and how does this factor into the formulation of new female identities?

The three chapters that follow each focus on a different aspect in relation to the developments of Taishō kimono. The first chapter will focus on the social and commercial context, and will serve as a literature review chapter. The second chapter will feature the developments that took place in the materials and techniques used to produce kimono. The third and last chapter will focus on female identities and the societal position of the woman.

[1] Hiroi Tazuko, “Wafuku to yōfuku: josei no fukusou no henka wa imi suru mono,” *Jissen eibungaku*, no. 71 (2020), p. 37.
Quote is my translation.

Selling New Looks and Inspiring New Identities: Consumerism and Kimono in the Taishō Period

The aim of this chapter is to provide a background of the social and commercial developments of the Taishō period, which enabled and coexisted with the aspects of technological advancements and shifts in gender roles that the second and third chapter will focus on. This chapter mainly features the three key sources of this thesis: Barbara Sato's book *The New Japanese Woman: Modernity, Media, and Women in Interwar Japan* (2003), the 2020 V&A Exhibition Catalogue *Kimono: Kyoto to Catwalk* (edited by Anna Jackson), and Terry Satsuki Milhaupt's book *Kimono: A Modern History* (2014). First is a discussion of key subjects that are featured in the three works, followed by short reviews on how the three books feature and discuss the themes of kimono, the notion of 'modernity' and the position of the woman.

Consumerism and Mass Media

In the period between 1905 and 1918, after the Russo-Japanese war until the end of World War One, Japanese society shifted from being an agricultural economy to being an industrial economy, spurred on by the war industry. When World War One debilitated the production of certain goods in Europe, the Europeans looked to Japan to import them. This caused the Japanese economy to flourish, albeit not for very long.[2] A central theme in Sato's *The New Japanese Woman* is the consumer culture that took root in this period. Although the soaring stock prices of 1915 and early 1916 were short-lived and the economic growth had ended by the time 1920 came around, it was not without effect. A new middle class of white-collar workers emerged, growing from 2.5% of the population in 1903 to 6.5% in 1918 and 10% in 1921.[3] Sato writes:

> White-collar workers were beginning to find themselves with extra money to purchase consumer goods like clothing and homewares. Kuwabara mused that even the unskilled labourer enjoyed newfound leisure time, albeit in varying amounts. For some urban women, the taste of this honey would render the transformation of everyday practices irreversible.[4]

[2] "Introduction." In *Japan's Competing Modernities: Issues in Culture and Democracy, 1900-1930,* edited by Sharon A. Minichiello, 4-5.
[3] Barbara Sato, *The New Japanese Woman : Modernity, Media, and Women in Interwar Japan*, (Durham : Duke University Press, 2003), 30.
[4] Sato, *The New Japanese Woman*, 30.

Emphasis should be made on the word *urban*, as it is important to keep in mind that a very large portion of the population at this time was comprised of commoners living in the countryside. In her chapter *Modernizing the kimono*, Milhaupt mentions that at the beginning of the early 19th century perhaps 20% of the population, comprised of the samurai and some wealthy merchants, was able to purchase silk cloth. The other approximately 80% of the population wore cotton garments. Keeping these figures in mind, it perhaps becomes a bit clearer that a newly emerged middle class amounting to 10% percent of the population is quite significant.[5]

Another key theme in Sato's book is the role of mass media. While she focuses more on the role it played in changing perspectives on the role of women in society, it is undeniable that it also did a lot to spur on the dissemination of consumerism. 'Trendy articles' (*ryūkō kiji*), one of the three types of articles in women's magazines Sato writes about, familiarised readers of mass women's magazines with the latest trends. She argues that the profusion of women's magazines in the early 20th century was both helped along by and in part responsible for the fact that the public saw "mass" culture as something feminine.[6] Besides the 'magazines as commodities' themselves, the advertisements in these magazines also encouraged consumerism. Sato shows a number of examples advertising cosmetics and one for lightbulbs, but they seem to serve mostly as a visual interlude, not so much to support any argument, as she writes nothing about them and some of the descriptions even appear to be incorrect. Nevertheless, it is interesting to look at the images and contrast them to the various cover images of magazines Sato has also added. All of the advertisements feature women with short modern haircuts, accessories and, where visible, Western-style clothes, while only one of the women on the magazine covers wears Western-style clothing. The other two covers both feature women in kimono. It is not surprising that the advertisements for modern products show images of women in modern fashions. Sato writes: 'In its most visible form, consumerism was incarnated in the media, popular music, and jazz. It was symbolized by the neon lights, the cafés and dance halls, Western fashions, and the bobbed hair of the modern girl.'[7] Western influences were widespread. Nevertheless, Sato argues, as these aspects of urbanization and consumerism were seen throughout the world, it cannot all be called westernization. Similarly, the spread of mass media also cannot be accredited purely to modern Western influence. Japan already had a very high rate of literacy in the Edo period

[5] Terry Satsuki Milhaupt, *Kimono : a Modern History*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), 83-88.
[6] Sato, *The New Japanese Woman*, 82.
[7] Sato, *The New Japanese Woman*, 32.

(1603-1868), and the people of this era were also familiar with newspaper-like media, which laid the groundwork for the significant readership in the Taishō period.[8]

Milhaupt claims that the conditions of this new urban society were perfect to cater to the expanding commercial market for textiles: mass media aided the dissemination of information about the products – advertisements, women's magazines and pattern books informed urban women, and even those beyond the city limits, of the latest trends – promotions and exhibitions persuaded people to come to the newly emerged department stores, and improved infrastructure and transportation between cities helped move the textile industry beyond regional borders. However, despite the general massification of society, fabrics were a matter of regional specialty, diversified by technological advancements in the textile industry.[9] In the chapter *Meibutsu and Commericalized Travel in Early Modern Japan*, recreational travel in the Edo period is discussed. These travels occurred along the Gokaidō, the five so-called highways, which connected important areas on Honshu, the main island of Japan. Inns, restaurants, teahouses and food stalls at the many checkpoints, rest stops and post stations along the way catered to the travellers, and part of the appeal were the *meibutsu*, local specialties ranging from food, items such as pottery or fabric, and even scenery buildings and statues. The many travel guides and other travel-related publications informed readers of all that was to be found along the *Gokaidō*, all the famous places and the regional specialties related to them.[10] It is no wonder with this history that the early twentieth century Japanese also valued products specific to certain regions, all the more because the circumstances admitted by modernity provided access to special fabrics that might have been previously unattainable due to geographical distance. Incidentally, one might liken the Edo period travelogues that permitted those unable to travel to experience the trip through their imagination right from their own homes, to the early twentieth century mass magazines. Those women who did not live in the city or did not have substantial financial means would in all likelihood never visit the Ginza or the Mitsukoshi department store, but the women's magazines offered them a way to imagine what it would be like.

[8] Sato, *The New Japanese Woman*, 34-35.
[9] Milhaupt, *Kimono*, 93-95, 101.
[10] Katarzyna J. Cwiertka and Yasuhara Miho, "Meibutsu and Commercialized Travel in Early Modern Japan." In *Branding Japanese Food: From Meibutsu to Washoku* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2020), 49-53.

Change and Continuity in Dress

Although the twentieth century brought along new fashions from the West, this did not mean that everything changed overnight. An often-quoted survey was published by Kon Wajirō in 1925. In it, he studied over a thousand men and women strolling through the Ginza, Tokyo's most fashionable district at the time. Despite the fact that one would perhaps expect everyone to be dressed in the latest fashions from the West, like so many of the advertisements showed, 99% of the women he observed wore kimono. For the men, this percentage was 33%.[11] This discrepancy can be explained by the fact that many men took to wearing western suits during the Meiji period. In the chapter 'Fashioning Modernity in Japan' of the *Kyoto to Catwalk* catalogue, Anna Jackson writes that by the 1880s, full western garb was adopted by 'all those who considered themselves men of the new political order.' Women for the most part kept on wearing kimono, but *hakama* (a type of wide pleated skirt-pants) and *haori* (a kimono jacket), previously only worn by men, were adopted by women.[12] Milhaupt goes more into detail on the integration of Western style dress into Japanese society in the Meiji era. She writes that the imperial family first started wearing Western style clothing to show the world that they were on equal footing with the Western powers, and the government officials followed suit. Having witnessed other Asian countries being colonised by the West, Japan was in a position where they both wished to show the Western powers that they were able to follow along with their ways, yet also portray the Japanese culture as something to be proud of. This is exemplified by the fact that the Meiji era Empress encouraged women to wear the bustle dresses of the West, yet have them made with local materials. It was really only the women of the elite who did wear these fashions, no doubt in part due to the unfamiliar, not to mention impractical nature of these dresses and undergarments, and the cost of the yardage involved in such a gown. Additionally, in the chapter 'Yielding Place to New' of her book *The Story of the Kimono*, Jill Liddell writes about how the Meiji Empress tried to encourage the women of Japan to adopt Western style clothes. As mentioned, it was not all that successful:

> By the 1890s the euphoria over Westernization had evaporated, and a new phrase became popular: *Bunmei Byo*, or "Civilization Disease," reflecting the growing unease over the importation of all foreign things. There was a return to traditional clothing, which was given the imperial seal of approval in 1912, when the new Emperor Taishō and his consort were crowned wearing ancient Heian-period court dress like their forebears.[13]

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[11] Sato, *The New Japanese Woman*, 49.
[12] Anna Jackson, "Fashioning Modernity in Japan," in *KIMONO : Kyoto to Catwalk*, ed. Anna Jackson (London: V&A Publishing, 2020), 153-154.
[13] Jill Liddell, *The Story of the Kimono* (New York, 1989): p. 191.

It was also in this era that the view of Western-as-modern and Japanese-as-traditional emerged. As Japan was forced to interact with the West, nationalism gained ground and called for the preservation of Japanese culture, epitomised in the image of a woman in kimono. Both *Kyoto to Catwalk* and Milhaupt's *Kimono: A Modern History* discuss this shift of meaning of kimono into a symbol of Japanese tradition.[14] And to a large extent, the responsibility of preserving Japanese tradition was laid on women. By the 1890s, nationalism and the state ideal of 'good wife, wise mother' were prevalent and these dictated the behaviour that was expected of Japanese women as preservers of the cultural heritage.[15] It was not just women wearing kimono though, as many of the men who wore Western style suits while out and about still preferred to wear a *nagajuban*, an under-kimono, while at home. Additionally, there were many men who worked as merchants or labourers who simply continued to wear kimono, and Milhaupt also mentions a trend for purposefully wearing kimono as a form of nationalism, or as she puts it, self-orientalisation, even. She mentions author and scholar Okakura Kakuzō (1862-1913) telling his son to wear kimono when travelling in the Western world, but only if he was fluent in English. It was a 'symbolic resistance to the West's cultural colonisation of Japan'.[16]

These influences carried over into the Taishō period. Although this period is sometimes seen as a period of sudden modernisation, a society does not change overnight. Rather than sudden change to modernity, we could look at the Taishō period as transitional. While some people, most of whom men, adopted Western style clothing as daily wear, most people continued to wear kimono. This is not all that surprising when one considers that that was the way it had been for centuries. While the look and precise manner of wearing kimono did change over time, the actual shape and fit of the garment did not. Additionally, the construction of a kimono, something which most common people did themselves using purchased rolls of fabric or even homespun fabric, is relatively simple. The Western style garments on the other hand were unfamiliar, and while the fashions of 1920s Europe and America were significantly less constrictive and complicated than the bustle dresses as advocated by the Empress in the Meiji period, a woman was still sure to stand out when wearing them. As such, it is no wonder that there was such a market for kimono textiles in this period.

[14] Milhaupt, *Kimono*,. 56-57, 62-63, 97.
[15] Anna Jackson, "Fashioning Modernity in Japan," in *KIMONO : Kyoto to Catwalk*, ed. Anna Jackson (London: V&A Publishing, 2020), 153-154, 158.
[16] Milhaupt, *Kimono*, 97-99

Inheritance from the Edo Period

In her introduction, Milhaupt calls the kimono a 'tableau on which to inscribe, describe and absorb the effects of modernisation, a record of Japan's efforts to shape its national identity on the world stage'. By studying kimono, one can detect shifts in aesthetics, social and cultural changes. As such, it is anything but traditional, contrary to the image the garment has received since the Meiji period. On the other hand, Milhaupt also mentions that while the perception of kimono changes, the actual garment does not. [17] As such, the Taishō period textile industry, while rapidly developing, is bound to have inherited practices from the Edo period.

In the chapter 'Picturing Fashion in Edo-Period Japan' of *Kyoto to Catwalk*, Masami Yamada writes that fashion trends and commerce were already tied in the Edo period.[18] As previously mentioned, the common practice in the Edo period and carrying on into the early 20th century, was to purchase rolls of fabric which were then made into kimono. Elite (samurai) households would commission new kimono twice a year, which were worn a number of times that year, and again after that. The 'old' garments would often be gifted to retainers and such, or donated to temples. The rolls of fabric that were to be made into kimono would be chosen based on so-called *hinagatabon*, books that featured the available styles.[19] This illustrates the collaboration that existed between the publishing industry and the textile industry in Edo. Milhaupt writes that the kimono was a reflection of one's status in society during the Edo period. Sumptuary laws were in place to ensure that the separation between the social classes remained protected. The pattern books served as catalogues to communicate with customers, but they also served a secondary function. With the shift of economic power to the merchant class, the lowest status among the four classes (samurai, farmers, artisans then merchants), it became necessary to instruct people on what styles were appropriate for what age and status. It needs to be stated that it was only a small wealthy elite that was able to peruse these catalogues and order garments from them, as most of the population wove and sewed their own garments. This, incidentally, once again emphasizes the significance of the rise of a middle class of 10% of the population in the 1920s.[20]

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[17] Milhaupt, *Kimono*, 11, 19, 23.
[18] Masami Yamada, "Picturing Fashion in Edo-Period Japan" in *KIMONO : Kyoto to Catwalk*, ed. Anna Jackson (London: V&A Publishing, 2020), *115.*
[19] Anna Jackson and Iwao Nagasaki, "Creation and Commerce," in *KIMONO : Kyoto to Catwalk*, ed. Anna Jackson (London: V&A Publishing, 2020), 83, 86-87.
[20] Milhaupt, *Kimono*, 33-34, 43, 47, 53-54.

Although the scale of the textile industry in the Edo period was different from that of the Taishō period, one could still call it a 'fashion industry'. Besides pattern books, the publishing industry collaborated with the textile industry in another way: the production of ukiyo-e prints as advertisements and fashion plates. Prints of *bijin* (literally 'beautiful people/person', but mostly referring to beautiful women) informed people of the latest trends in colours, designs and ways to tie one's obi. Milhaupt describes how kabuki actors also popularized certain colours or styles, such as the *onnagata*-actor (male actors who specialize in female roles) known as Rokō who introduced a trend for tea-coloured kimono, after which the colour became known as *Rokō-cha*. The *Kyoto to Catwalk* catalogue also features a marvellous example of a similar phenomenon in Anna Jackson's chapter 'Status, Style and Seduction'. Kabuki actor Ichikawa Danjurō VII appeared on stage in a costume featuring a sickle (*kama*), a circle (*wa*) and the hiragana character *nu*, which when added together reads *kamawanu*, meaning "I don't give a damn". This design became popular among fans. The following two prints (image 2 and 3), both by Utagawa Toyokuni, showcase the actor wearing the pattern. The first is featured in *Kyoto to Catwalk*, the second is another print I came across showing the pattern in a slightly different way. This phenomenon reminds me of a similar thing that happened, present day.

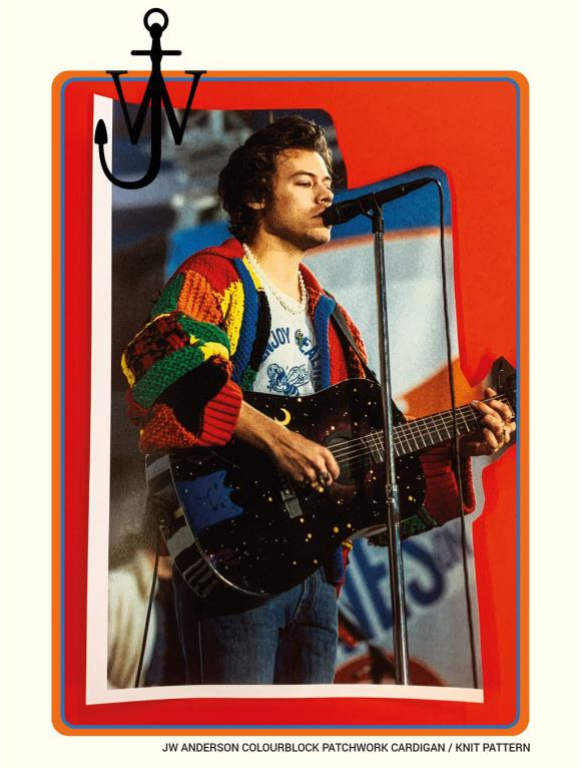
When singer Harry Styles wore a patchwork cardigan by the brand JW Anderson to the rehearsal for his appearance on the *Today Show* in Febuary of 2020, it inspired many of his fans to recreate the piece originally priced at 1,600 US$ (see image 4). Countless pictures and videos appeared on social media and the internet. This apparently encouraged the designer to share the pattern on their website.[21] It is interesting to be able to contextualize historic phenomena in this way, as it reminds us of the fact that although we may now see these prints and stories in an intellectual context, they were once part of the everyday lives of regular people. It also ties into a point that is made in Kyoto to Catwalk by Masami Yamada: the fact that fashion was a

[21] https://www.teenvogue.com/story/harry-styles-cardigan-crochet-tiktok-trend accessed: 23rd of November 2021.

Image 2 (left): *The actor Ichikawa Danjūrō VII*, by Utagawa Toyokuni (1769–1825), Edo (Tokyo), 1805–10, V&A collection, London

Image 3 (right): *The actor Ichikawa Danjuro VII as 'the farmer Jussaku, in reality Sukune Taro'*, by Utagawa Toyokuni (1769–1825), Edo (Tokyo), 1814. British Museum collection, London.

Image 4 (below): Singer Harry Styles wearing the patchwork cardigan (2020).
Source: https://www.jwanderson.com/jp/cardigan-pattern



major pursuit for women of all classes.[22] Oftentimes the fashion that is studied is not that of the common people, simply because there is not much left. Clothes are there to be used, and many people did not have the means to purchase an abundance of lavish clothes, only to wear them a handful of times, give them away and repeat the process. These lavish clothes and prints make for a seductive subject to study, even if they maybe are not exactly representative of the everyday reality of the masses. Nevertheless, we should remember that one's financial status does not represent one's wish to look fashionable.

The Rise of Department Stores

With the aforementioned shift of economic power to the merchant class in the Edo period, the textile industry also changed. Rather than unique bespoke garments, a shift towards more standardized kimono occurred, suitable for a different public. Similarly, in the late 19th century, the consumer base also shifted with the rise of the new middle class.[23] Additionally, both Milhaupt and *Kyoto to Catwalk* mention the fact that with the end of the official abolishment of the class distinctions in society, the sumptuary laws were also abolished.[24] This meant that "sartorial choices were no longer dictated by birth but by the consumer's taste and economic status".[25] People could now wear whatever they could afford and felt comfortable in, and the options for designers also opened up.

A new sales environment for the textile industry arose with the emergence of department stores in the early 20th century, the first being the Mitsukoshi Department Store which opened in 1904. Previously the Echigoya Kimono Store, the Mitsukoshi led the way in establishing this new way of merchandizing, inspired by the Western examples of Department Stores as observed by those who travelled to the West, as well as by the displays of the various countries at the Great Exhibitions – the international events where various countries of the world could show the other nations the latest developments in science, technology, fashion and trade. The way people purchased things, spurred on by the rising commercialist society, was changed by the way the department stores operated. Glass display cases showed off the merchandize to the customers, allowing people to peruse the wares without pressure to purchase anything as was often the case in traditional kimono stores. Milhaupt writes:

[22] Masami Yamada, "Picturing Fashion in Edo-Period Japan," in *KIMONO : Kyoto to Catwalk*, ed. Anna Jackson (London: V&A Publishing, 2020), 112.
[23] Milhaupt, *Kimono*, 54, 80.
[24] Anna Jackson, "Fashioning Modernity in Japan," in *KIMONO : Kyoto to Catwalk*, ed. Anna Jackson (London: V&A Publishing, 2020), 156.
[25] Milhaupt, *Kimono*, 80.

> Concurrent shifts in consumer culture, particularly evident from the 1920s, affected kimono production and marketing strategies. Urban shoppers perused displays of kimono fabrics rather than waiting for shop boys to fetch rolls from the storeroom. In an effort to stimulate desire for the most up-to-date patterns and fabrics, marketers designed posters and magazine advertisements that featured celebrated women wearing the latest fashions. Designers packaged their merchandise under their own labels, giving birth to brand recognition.[26]

She also writes that the staff of the department stores was trained to familiarize the customers with the new, unfamiliar products and clothes. Sato also mentions this matter of familiarization with the unfamiliar new fashions and contrivances, but she attributes this quality to magazine articles, rather than department store staff. Additionally, Milhaupt is the only one who mentioned the element of no-strings-attached perusal, even though it seems like such an important factor in a changing commercial landscape that ties into the notion of shopping and browsing department stores as a form of escapism, irrespective of whether people could actually afford to buy the products. Sato writes that with the predominance of the 'good wife, wise mother' ideal since the 1890s, commercialism and shopping for the sake of entertainment can be seen as a challenge to the existing role of women. This is because the ideal wife and mother was smart with money and did not spend it on unnecessary things.[27]

Besides being significant in the reconfiguration of gender roles, being able to peruse department stores was also a smart sales technique, as having more people come through the store is likely to have meant more sales. The print below (see image 5) by Okumura Masanobu shows the interior of the Echigoya kimono store, the precursor of the Mituskoshi. The emblem of the store is clearly visible, making it obvious that this is an advertisement. It also portrays the goings-on of a kimono store in the Edo period, and it is very clear that this is not a shop you would enter without a purpose. There is not much fabric to be seen, so even if the shop is open on two sides, one could hardly 'window shop'. Considering this, it becomes easier to understand the difference that the glass display cases and the resulting more casual shopping experience made.

[26] Milhaupt, *Kimono*, 227.
[27] Sato, *The New Japanese Woman*, 15-16.

Image 5: *Large Perspective View of the Interior of Echigo-ya in Suruga-chō*, by Okumura Masanobu, circa 1745. Collection of Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.

Milhaupt describes that Kon Wajirō also researched the Mitsukoshi and how people behaved there. One of the things that became evident in his research was the fact that the department store floors were divided based on deliberateness: small things like cosmetics, accessories and foodstuffs could be found on the ground floor, kimono fabrics made of cotton and muslin were on the second floor, then the higher quality fabrics like various silks and obi could be found on the third floor, followed by western style clothing and accessories on the fourth, and home appliances and furnishings on the fifth floor.[28] It stands to reason that the small products that one might buy on impulse while browsing, or perhaps the only things someone might have been able to afford, would be close to the entrance, while the things that one is very unlikely to buy without having come to the store for that purpose – like furniture or precious silk kimono – require a more intentional approach. The fact that Western style clothing and accessories were sold on the fourth floor, even higher up than the luxury kimono fabrics, is another indicator of the fact that the flapper fashions were not all that common.

[28] Milhaupt, *Kimono*, 112.

"Although customers could still request kimonos to be made to their specifications, they increasingly followed trends that were either forecast or dictated by designers employed by kimono makers and in-house design sections of the department stores," Milhaupt writes.[29] This was by no means coincidental, as the department stores implemented various clever marketing strategies to facilitate better sales. For a large part, they leaned on mass media. Using new technologies, large scale posters featuring famous people like actors and singers wearing the latest styles were produced. Although using famous people to sell products was not a new strategy and prints had played a significant role in the textile industry in the Edo period as mentioned, I argue the effect will have been different now that it had become more common to depict people in a way that resembled individual persons; especially considering that the general style of *ukiyo-e* was to depict people in a very standardised way, and the onlookers had to rely on other cues than the way someone's face was depicted in order to recognise them.

Renowned artists and designers were also hired to design posters showcasing particular styles as well as new kimono designs. Furthermore, design competitions were held for posters showing the latest fashions, which was very clever because besides the intended advertisement poster, it also undoubtedly stimulated the arts and provided the departments stores with an opportunity to scout new talented designers and artists to hire. The Mitsukoshi instated an in-house publishing department, as well as a design department which was later split into a more specialized design department and a graphic design department. The designers were drafted from art schools, and all of this was aimed at curating a 'Mitsukoshi' signature brand, a curated look, to portray an image of the Mitsukoshi as 'arbiter of taste'. Designers also gained their own labels, as mentioned in the passage quoted from Milhaupt earlier this section. Although there had been some instances in the past where certain designers of kimono had gained a name for themselves, for the most part they were anonymous. Now having various 'brands' of various artists was used to cultivate the 'Mitsukoshi look'. Besides trying to improve sales, the Mitsukoshi also had a more idealistic agenda of hosting events and research groups, as well as the in-house publication of magazines among other things, for 'the betterment of society'. These events and publications aimed to stimulate readers to embrace mechanisation and modernisation.[30] As such, the

[29] Milhaupt, *Kimono*, 179.
[30] Milhaupt, *Kimono*, 98-101, 115, 120, 180-182.

department stores, centres of commercialisation, played a large role in the changing urban society.

Synthesis: Mixing the Old and the New

In her introduction, Sato writes that World War II did not cause a break in continuity as is often thought. The processes behind the shift in urban women's lives that seems to have occurred after the war, were already in motion before that.[31] This ties into the notion of viewing Taishō as a transitional period. To try to identify the start of 'modernity' would not only be too simplistic, it would also be totally dependent on one's perspective. Depending on the country, or location in that country, the people in question, the social environment, the subject it concerns; all of these factors result in different ideas on what 'modernity' might mean. An example is that regarding the 1923 Great Kantō Earthquake, a terrible disaster that resulted in great destruction and loss of life in Tokyo among other places, Sato and Milhaupt put forth to different angles. Sato emphasises the fact that rebuilding after the earthquake offered an opportunity to embrace new, particularly American, customs and influences.[32] Milhaupt, on the other hand, writes that besides renewed fascination for Western style and architecture, the earthquake fostered a reverence and nostalgia for tradition, which resulted in the fact that most women decided to replace their ruined kimono with new kimono, rather than use this opportunity to embrace Western dress.[33] Chapter three will offer more on the reasons behind this.

So although the Meiji period produced a notion of Western equals modern vs Japanese equals traditional, it is more complicated than that. Milhaupt writes the following:

> As prints, poster and photographs of those times demonstrate, fashions were eclectic fusions of Japanese and Western elements, both traditional and modern. Indeed, delineating 'modern dress' as exclusively western and 'traditional dress' as exclusively Japanese is a later mischaracterization of the fashions of that period.[34]

In the first three decades of the 20th century, people combined Japanese and Western dress, for example by wearing leather boots or gloves and parasols, as well as kimono featuring Western motifs. And although the focus is often on Western influence on Japanese fashion, there were also movements that went the other direction. As mentioned in the short review, *Kyoto to Catwalk* gives examples of influences going both ways. The *Kyoto to Catwalk*

[31] Sato, *The New Japanese Woman*, 6-7.
[32] Sato, *The New Japanese Woman*, 34.
[33] Milhaupt, *Kimono*, 110.
[34] Milhaupt, *Kimono*, 230.

chapter *The 'Nippon Kimono' Voyages to Europe* by Yuzuhara Oyama for example, tells the tale of how the Dutch East India Company were exposed to the kimono through trade with Japan in the early 17th century. Although not many Japanese kimono found their way to Europe, the general style was adopted and became popular under the name 'Japonse rock'.[35]

I found Akiko Fukai's chapter *Radical Restructure: The Impact of Kimono* particularly enlightening. In it she illustrates the influence that the kimono had on the designs of for example the late 19th century and early 20th century designs of French designer Madame de Vionnet, as well as designs by Viennese artist Emilie Flöge. Photographs of gowns and robes featuring either a kimono-inspired silhouette or recognisably Asian decorations (such as bamboo shoots or peonies) illustrate her chapter. A number of Art Deco accessories of the French luxury brand Cartier are also shown, and the Japanese influence is clearly visible in the black set inspired by lacquer wear, the bracelet with cherry blossom design, and the vanity case shaped like an *inrō*, a small case that men in the Edo period wore suspended from their obi. Fukai writes:

> The kimono was an important catalyst for modernism in dress that accorded with broader contemporary art and design movements. With the focus on simple forms and straight lines, the impact of kimono in fashion relates to the evolution of Art influence of Japanese dress can also be discerned in jewellery and dress accessories of the period, particularly those created by the celebrated French firm of Cartier.[36]

As the wording 'that accorded with broader contemporary art and design movements' aptly describes, it is impossible to say for certain what was influenced by what and whom by whom, and in what order. Nevertheless, I find it striking that Art Deco – and although Fukai does not mention it in so many words, Art Nouveau too – which is a clear influence on Taishō kimono, was in turn influenced by kimono and Japanese material culture. I have always considered Art Deco as a natural consequence of Art Nouveau, a movement from organic and flowing lines and forms to more geometrical, less ornamental lines. Japan has been identified as a source of inspiration for Art Nouveau (or many of the counterparts from other countries), as is particularly evident in the following 1900 chair by Austrian Secession artist Koloman Moser (see image 6) and the circa 1902 Wisteria lamp (see image 7) by American designer Louis Comfort Tiffany. The shape of the chair is very reminiscent of Japanese architecture, not to mention the shiny black that reminds us of lacquer work, as well as the checkerboard-

[35] Yuzuhara Oyama, *"*The 'Nippon Kimono' Voyages to Europe,*"* in *KIMONO : Kyoto to Catwalk,* ed. Anna Jackson (London: V&A Publishing, 2020), 129-148.
[36] Akiko Fukai, "Radical Restructure: The Impact of Kimono,*"* in *KIMONO : Kyoto to Catwalk,* ed. Anna Jackson (London: V&A Publishing, 2020), 207.

pattern so well loved by the Japanese. Since the Japanese word for wisteria, *fuji* 藤, is the first character of the Fujiwara clan name, this flower plays a large role in Japanese culture. The Fujiwara family was very influential since the Heian period and provided many imperial regents. The wisteria was often used in artworks and poems to subtly but unmistakably refer to the Fujiwara clan. Although it is hard to say if this was the case for certain, it is plausible that Tiffany was inspired by the Japanese love for the wisteria. Thus recognising the fact that Japanese visual culture influenced Western Art Nouveau and Art Deco designers, it seems to me that in a very roundabout way, the Japanese, in being influenced by these styles, reintegrated their own cultural aspects as digested by the West. In the chapter *Modernism Through the Lense of Kimono Patterns* in the book *Kimono Design: An Introduction to Textiles and Patterns* by Keiko Nitanai, Tanaka Keiko confirms this theory. She writes:

> From the Paris Exposition of 1900, Art Nouveau made its way to Japan as the hottest artistic trend, exerting a massive influence over the arts and crafts of this country. Popular designs on kimono of the time included Art Nouveau-style Western flowers such as roses and tulips, peacocks and butterflies as well as patterns depicting flowing water. These motifs, which at a glance appear to be Western, actually arose from Japonism—in other words, they were Japanese designs which had taken on a Western flavor before returning to their country of origin. It was probably for this reason that they were so readily accepted into Japanese culture. [37]

Image 6 (left) : Chair by Austrian artist Koloman Moser, 1900. Collection of *Los Angeles County Museum of Art* (LACMA).
Image 7 (right) : Wisteria lamp by American designer Louis Comfort Tiffany, ca. 1902. Collection of *Virgina Museum of Fine Art*.

[37] Keiko Tanaka, "Modernism Through the Lense of Kimono Patterns," in *Kimono Design: An Introduction to Textiles and Patterns* by Keiko Nitanai, (Vermont: Tuttle Publishing, 2017), 368-369.

In any case, these examples illustrate that tracing the trajectory of influence and meaning of kimono is not straightforward. Milhaupt writes: 'The 1920s and '30s were a time of great ferment in kimono production, as Western influences mingled with traditional Japanese designs.'[38] She then goes on to explain that the transformation of kimono as daily wear into the largely ceremonial costume that it is today – a trend instigated in the Meiji period when Japan was trying to reinvent itself when faced with the West – was cemented in the 1940s. At the time, it was deemed a symbol of luxury inappropriate in times of war and then later was used to barter for food during the US occupation.[39]

Barbara Sato's *The New Japanese Woman*

The main subject of *The New Japanese Woman* is how the role of women in society changed during the interwar period (the Taishō and early Shōwa periods), and the role that mass media and commercialisation played in this. Sato argues that many people, both intellectuals of the Taishō period and later scholars, overlook the significance of magazines and commercialism in the shaping of new female identities. She also points out that rather than being an era of radical change, the Taishō period was transitional and it was a time where the seeds of changes that manifested after World War II were sown.

Sato goes into a lot of detail on the debates that took place on the topic of the 'modern girl', or *moga* for short. The *moga* was an icon, an ideal rather than a real person, and an ambiguous figure. The image of the *moga* stood for radical change, defiance against the traditionalist ideal the Meiji government had imposed on Japanese women. On the other hand, there were people who were disappointed that while the 'new woman', the blue-stocking *atarashii onna* that came before the *moga*, acted to advance women's rights and position in society, the *moga* seemed to have no such ambitions. They thought of *moga* as superficial and vapid, only concerned with outer appearances, and in that way not at all modern. With the emergence of women working among men, often hired only for their looks and dressed in Western styles, people were worried that the women were being led down a path of sexual depravity. The *moga* gained a reputation of being promiscuous. Despite the worries for the morals of young women, Sato writes that women were unlikely to follow into the footsteps of the *moga*, as they did not view the life of a modern girl as an actually attainable option.

[38] Milhaupt, *Kimono*, 187.
[39] Milhaupt, *Kimono*, 190.

Despite the fact that Sato paints a very detailed picture of the controversial nature of the *moga*, and that she mentions that most women kept wearing kimono, she does not explicitly write that it is likely that a lot of women avoided Western clothing as a result of this controversial nature. Although she writes about different types of women in Taishō urban society and shows that there was not one single 'modern female identity', Sato is missing the notion of a modern kimono-clad woman. In fact, she writes very little about kimono, which is unfortunate. Considering the very visual nature of the consumerist society and its media, the *moga* image created through this, and the traditionalist ideal image of a woman clad in kimono as an antithesis to this, it is surprising that Sato does not mention kimono beyond being the norm for daily wear. It leaves room for the oversimplified dichotomy of Western dress-clad *moga* vs kimono-clad 'good wife, wise mother', which defies the nuanced range of developing female identities Sato is trying to illustrate through her book.

KIMONO: Kyoto to Catwalk

Kyoto to Catwalk features the story of kimono and its interaction with the rest of the world, covering a period from the Edo period until the present. Despite the fact that this is a much wider temporal range than Sato's book, it offers a lot of interesting and useful information regarding kimono during the Taishō and early Shōwa period. Where Sato did not mention a middle ground between the radical and controversial *moga* in Western style dress and the woman in kimono embodying and preserving "Japanese tradition", *Kyoto to Catwalk* does. Within the contributions by many different authors it is explained that although most women continued to wear kimono in the interwar period (1890s had brought an increase in nationalist sentiments and the 'good wife, wise mother' ideal emphasising the woman's role as the preserver of tradition), the technologies, materials and motifs adopted from the West offered women the option to wear relatively affordable kimono with a distinctly modern style. Wearing these bold and colourful kimono in tandem with the latest hair and make-up styles allowed women to express modernity and without "abandoning Japanese values", as exemplified by the character Naomi in Junichiro Tanizaki's novel *Naomi*, who wears kimono to the jazz club.

One thing that sets this book apart from the other two is the fact that it focuses on the *interaction* of Japan and the rest of the World. While there is generally a lot of focus on the Western influences on Japan in the late 19th and early 20th century, Japan already adopted design influences from for example India during the Edo period. The popularity of *shimamono* and *sarasa*, both styles introduced from India, illustrate that beyond the often

emphasized inside/outside and native/foreign dichotomies, Japanese culture also shows an ability to assimilate foreign influences. Besides the world at large inspiring Japanese design, inspiration also went the other direction. For example, influential designers of the early 20th century such as Paul Poiret and Madame Vionnet were inspired by the kimono's lines, thus informing the loose and vertical cut of the 20s fashion. It is interesting to consider that the Western styles adopted in the Taishō period might then also be considered Japanese to an extent. *Kyoto to Catwalk* also describes how the kimono slowly became codified as traditional and ceremonial. What was once a possibility to express oneself slowly became a kind of ceremonial costume of Japanese tradition, and Western style clothing replaced kimono as daily wear after the second World War.

Terry Satsuki Milhaupt's *Kimono: A Modern History*

Milhaupt also describes this development in the perception of kimono in much detail. She does however emphasize that kimono is not traditional, but a reflection of the times. She considers it a canvas on which the developments throughout its history are visible. For most of its history, kimono was daily wear, and for most people in the Taishō period, this was no different. Although there were people, mostly men, who took to wearing Western dress to stand on equal foot with the West and avoid being seen as a target for colonisation like so many other Asian countries, as well as express a willingness to move forward and modernise, most people stuck to what they knew. This is exemplified by the fact that after the destruction caused by the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923, most people replaced their ruined clothes with new kimono. While Sato emphasises the aftermath of this catastrophe as an opportunity to embrace the new, Milhaupt describes how, while there certainly was an interest in modernisation in the period of rebuilding that followed after the earthquake, it also fostered a renewed appreciation for the Japanese culture, aided by the nationalist sentiments that had emerged in the Meiji period. Until the second World War, women were expected by many to wear kimono in their symbolic role as preservers of tradition. In World War II, kimono were deemed inappropriate, and when kimono were even bartered for food during the American occupation after, its role as daily wear was firmly in the past, remaining only as traditional dress worn for special occasions.

Milhaupt writes a lot about the technical aspects of producing kimono. She expands on the technologies that were adopted from the West, the developments within the textile industry, as well as new techniques that were developed and enabled new designs. It gives insight into the circumstances that enabled the shifting consumer base, the rising middle class,

to purchase many new and exciting designs for a relatively affordable price. She also describes the role department stores had in this, and the way they influenced female identities by presenting an ideal image to pursue. Although Milhaupt pays a lot of attention to the developments of the textile industry from the Edo period onwards and the way the image of the kimono changed, she does not forget the people wearing the clothes. She writes that a woman wearing kimono can just as well be considered a modern woman as her contemporaries choosing to wear Western clothes, making her ‘simultaneously conventional and up-to-date’.

The Fabric of Taishō Style:
Technological Developments in the Early 20th Century

Where the previous chapter focused on the social and commercial context of Taishō kimono, this chapter will centre around the technological and material aspects. What changed in the textile industry? What were the new possibilities? These aspects play an important role in facilitating the iconic Taishō looks women of the period could express themselves with.

New Technologies

When the imperial court moved to Tokyo in the Meiji period, the luxury silk industry of Kyoto, which had up until then relied largely on the patronage of the imperial family, was dealt quite a blow. With the city's major source of income gone, it was decided that innovation was the way to go forward. People were sent to Europe and the international exhibitions to learn about the latest technologies and techniques. The introduction of the Jacquard loom revolutionized weaving practices, along with Kaye's flying shuttle. Another major game changer was the introduction of aniline dyes. There were many new colour-options that had not been possible before, or that had been very expensive as they required large amounts of natural materials. An example is the colour purple, which had previously only been available to the rich elite. New technologies and materials, in combination with the abolition of sumptuary laws and higher living standards made for a situation in which a lot of people suddenly had many more options in terms of clothing.[40]

Once the knowledge of new techniques and technologies was acquired, the Japanese adapted them to suit the domestic textile industry and create new techniques and styles. A new technique called *kata-yūzen* was developed in 1879 by dyer Hirose Jisuke (1822-1890). In *Kimono: Fashioning Culture,* Liza Dalby describes *yūzen* (rice-paste resist) in the following way:

> The dramatic early Edo kosode style culminated in Genroku (1688-1704). A new technique of silk dyeing called yūzen allowed freeform drawing of fine white lines in resist that when dyed created crisp outlines between sharply defined small areas of color. Yūzen was a more painterly technique than earlier techniques of dyeing, and it provided the technical means to create wonderfully detailed pictorial themes. With yūzen came unabridged freedom of expression in kosode design and execution.[41]

[40] Anna Jackson, "Fashioning Modernity in Japan," in *KIMONO : Kyoto to Catwalk,* ed. Anna Jackson (London: V&A Publishing, 2020), 156-158.
[41] Liza Dalby *Kimono: Fashioning Culture*, (London : Vintage Random House, 1993), 43.

In this quote, kosode refers to the early Edo period predecessor of the kimono shape we are familiar with. The difference is the fact that the sleeves (*sode*) are smaller and more rounded. As revolutionary as the yūzen technique was in the early Edo period, the designs still had to be applied to the fabric by hand. Kata-yūzen introduced the use of stencils through which a dye-paste could be applied directly to the fabric. This was revolutionary because even though a stencil had to be made for every colour used in the design – which sometimes could be as many as 30 – which was time-consuming and thus costly, the stencils could be re-used, so multiples of the same kimono design could be made. If the design was possible, this could be as many 20-30 duplicates. Besides kata-yūzen, there was also the development of roller-printing technology. [42]

By the 1920s most textiles were produced in privately owned factories. Of those working in the factories, more than half of the labourers were women, which is not surprising considering the fact that a lot of women in Japan had to make their own clothes and are thus likely to have been very familiar with this field. The textile industry for a large part facilitated the government's efforts to industrialise and modernise the country by providing much of the needed capital. This underlines the importance of the textile industry and fashion in society. Besides working in the factories, many rural families also still spun and wove for personal use, as well as to supplement income. With the rise of Japanese textile export, by the 1880s the textiles woven and spun by regional families were also meant for export.[43]

Developments in the Textile Industry

In the 19th century, most of the Japanese population wore cotton (80% of the population in the early 19th century). What upon first introduction in the 16th century had been a luxury fabric had become the fabric worn by commoners in the 17th century. It was a major industry and in 1914 Japan was the world's biggest exporter of cotton. The output of patterned cotton fabrics increased until the late 19th century, when other inexpensive fabrics became available to the public.[44]

One such fabric was *meisen*. This sturdy and relatively cheap silk fabric was often dyed using the *kasuri* technique, a so-called *sakizome* technique (pre-weave dyeing) where the threads were dyed and a pattern would emerge once woven. The affordable fabric became wildly popular in the first half of the 20th century, which is evident from the fact that in the

[42] Milhaupt, *Kimono*, 88.
[43] Milhaupt, *Kimono*, 79, 107.
[44] Milhaupt, *Kimono*, 68-69, 88.

interwar period, nearly half of the silk kimono that were being produced were *meisen*. As such, nearly the half the women in Ginza also wore *meisen* in the 1920s and 30s. In the chapter *Fashioning Modernity in Japan* of *Kyoto to Catwalk*, Anna Jackson writes that the women working as typists, bank clerks, bus conductors, shop assistants and waitresses, jobs that often required female employees to be dressed in Western style clothes, wore *meisen* kimono in their leisure time. This once again cements the kimono as the preferred daily wear in the Taishō period, as even those women who were used to wearing Western style clothes seem to have worn kimono in their own time.[45] Milhaupt raises an interesting point in stating that while the popularity of *meisen* is often attributed to the fact that it was a relatively cheap fabric, it was likely due to sophisticated marketing (using posters) that it became so widespread.[46]

Although the invention of rayon eventually trumped the position of the Japanese in the silk manufacturing industry, Japan was the number one silk exporter in the world by 1912. Due to the fact that pébrine disease struck the silk worms of France and Italy, thus decimating their silk production around the 1850s, the Japanese and Chinese production increased significantly. To ensure that the quality of the product they imported was up to their standard, the Europeans invested in the modernisation of the silk-rearing techniques in Japan, resulting in a more consistent product. This also led to the Japanese silk industry being the most technologically advanced in the world by the 1920s and '30s.[47]

Patterns in Kimono

The new technologies and materials described in the previous sections paved the way for the production of kimono so characteristic to the Taishō (and early Shōwa) kimono. In some ways, these kimono do not differ fundamentally from the examples of previous eras. Although the Taishō era kimono are known especially for their adaptations of foreign, particularly Western influences in terms of patterns, the truth is that Japanese designers have taken inspiration from beyond their own borders for much longer than that. Anna Jackson's chapter *A Taste for the Exotic: Foreign Textiles and Japanese Dress* describes how in the 17th century, the Dutch, being the only Europeans allowed to trade with Japan, introduced European goods. A trend emerged, the so-called 'taste for Holland', *Oranda shumi,* and this

[45] Anna Jackson, "Fashioning Modernity in Japan," in *KIMONO : Kyoto to Catwalk*, ed. Anna Jackson (London: V&A Publishing, 2020), 165-166.
[46] Milhaupt, *Kimono*, 121.
[47] Milhaupt, *Kimono*, 66-68.

excitement over the exotic European or Dutch styles is evident in the *uchikake* (outer-kimono) made of French brocade silk and the 'netsuke in the form of a Dutchman holding a cockerel' that Jackson shows as examples. The same chapter also features the story of how Indian textiles were introduced through the Dutch. There were the stripes and checks, *shima-mono,* that were adopted into Japanese textile production and were so popular that the Indian origins were all but forgotten, and the *sarasa*, colourful block printed fabrics that the Japanese studied until they could produce their own *wa-sarasa* (Japanese *sarasa*).[48]

Another example of foreign inspiration on Japanese design is a fictitious textile pattern titled '*Ushi no Yodare'* (Cow's drool), which was designed by author and ukiyo-e artist Santō Kyōden (1761-1849) as a part of his 1784 *Komon zai* ('Scraps of small patterns'), which was a parody of textile samples. This *Ushi no Yodare* pattern was inspired by the cursive script that the Dutch used. In *The Making of Tōjin: Construction of the Other in Early Modern Japan* Suzuki Keiko writes: 'The pattern is quasi-letter doodles that, at a glance, look like Roman letters in cursive script. The attached text states "Dutch letters as I thought." Kyōden explains this in the revised book *Komon gawa*, playfully saying that "The Dutch make sense out of letters written in cow's drool…" Although the pattern is fictitious, it made fun of the fact that these loopy 'quasi-letter doodles' were seen on borders of ukiyo-e from the turn of the 19th century.[49] This shows that really anything could be used as a design inspiration.

In regards to the 20th century examples of Western influences, Milhaupt writes that it would be too simplistic to say that the Japanese 'borrowed' these motifs and painting techniques to impart a modern feel to the kimono. "Rather than copying or imitating the West – which actually adopted the kimono format from Japan – kimono designers in Japan sought to employ the latest materials and techniques to create new design that were distinctive to the Japanese context."[50] Another example is the fact that tulips became popular in mid- to late 20s designs, when they were starting to be cultivated in Japan. Although the flower is not native to Japan and can thus be considered a foreign influence, there is a long tradition of using flower patterns on kimono. This also ties into the fact that the traditional or conventional motifs that have been used for centuries are a stable presence in the repertoire of Japanese designers. Milhaupt writes:

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[48] Anna Jackson, "A Taste for the Exotic: Foreign Textiles and Japanese Dress," in *KIMONO : Kyoto to Catwalk*, ed. Anna Jackson (London: V&A Publishing, 2020), 119-123.
[49] Suzuki, Keiko. "The Making of Tōjin Construction of the Other in Early Modern Japan." *Asian Folklore Studies* 66, no. 1/2 (2007): 88.
[50] Milhaupt, *Kimono*, 24.

> Conventional motifs enjoy longevity in the Japanese design repertoire. Reiteration of those specific motifs, within both literary and visual traditions, links pre-modern and modern design. By observing particular motifs […] over time and across various media, we can learn much about shifts in Japanese design and aesthetic sensibilities.[51]

The book *Taisho Kimono: Beauty of Japanese Modernity in 1910s & 20s* is proof of this: many of the kimono showcased in this book feature traditional motifs and patterns. Although the novelty patterns and motifs seen on some Taishō kimono are certainly striking, it is the boldness of the colours and the large-scale patterns that sets the kimono of Taishō and early Shōwa kimono apart. Take for example the following two kimono. The first (see image 8) is an Outer Kimono for a Young Woman (*uchikake*) from the Edo period, made between 1800 and 1850. It is richly decorated with embroidery and the pattern is described as 'flowers and streams'. A closer inspection of the flowers shows that there are plum blossoms, peonies, and what appear to be chrysanthemums. Although the all-over patterning of the *uchikake* could be called quite busy, the white background and relatively small scale of the motifs are quite subtle. The second kimono (see image 9) is an entirely different story. This *meisen* silk kimono featured in the aforementioned *Taisho Kimono* book also has an all-over floral pattern with chrysanthemums, plum blossoms and, in this case, wild mandarin oranges. Aside from the fact that the *uchikake* is a formal garment, and the *meisen* kimono is quite casual, the motifs are similar. Yet in the Taishō example, it has been completely re-contextualised with regards to the earlier Edo period example. The flowers that are so dainty in the *uchikake*, have been severely scaled up in the Taishō example to create a very bold pattern, and the reserved colouring in white, shades of orange, green and a bit of gold of the embroidered Edo period example almost disappear when compared to the vivid yellow, pink, magenta, petrol and black of the *meisen* kimono, made possible by the newly imported aniline dyes. Where the girl wearing the Edo period *uchikake* will have impressed those around her with the sophisticated and costly *uchikake*, the girl wearing the Taishō *meisen* kimono will surely have dazzled her peers with the bold and exiting garment. Although shape of the garment and the motifs used to decorate it had not changed much, the Taishō period offered women new and exciting, and most importantly, *modern* kimono to express themselves with. And with the rise of the middle class and lowering of production costs, more and more women could afford to adopt this bold new look.

[51] Milhaupt, *Kimono*, 127.

Image 8 : *Outer Kimono for a Young Woman (Uchikake)*, 1800-1850. Silk, figured satin weave (rinzu). Khalili Collection, KX50.

Image 9 : *Kimono with Kiku Ume Tachibana (Chrysantemum, Plum Blossom and Wild Mandarin Orange) Pattern*, Taishō period. Meisen silk, stencil printed warp kasuri. From *Taisho Kimono: Beauty of Japanese Modernity in 1910s & 1920s* (p. 39). Part of Suzaku Classic Museum Collection.

Kimono and the Shaping of Female Identities

This third and final chapter describes the role of women in the Taishō period, how it was seen and what was changing. Women navigated a changing landscape of commercialism, mass media, modernisation, yet were also faced with state-imposed moral obligation to uphold tradition. The *moga*-icon was prominently present in the narrative and in the commercial context, but to what extent did this really influence ordinary urban women?

***Moga*: the face of modernity?**

One could say that the predecessor of the *modan gāru* is the 'new woman', the *atarashii onna*. These new women were a group of educated young women in the beginning of the 20th century who practiced self-cultivation through reading, writing and meditating, and who pursued social equality and questioned established gender roles. The Bluestocking Society (*Seitōsha*) was a group of such new women and through articles in their magazine *Bluestockings* (*Seitō*), as well as contributions to other magazines, these women spoke out against the "good wife, wise mother" morality which was amply represented in the Meiji Civil Code (1898), and argued for women to be respected as human beings and individuals. This Civil Code generally favoured men and did not do much to protect women, essentially condemning them to a life that was limited to the family and home-life. Sato writes:

> […] by the late 1890s the home had come under the purview of the state. Women, made the cornerstone for implementing a new national identity, were assigned specific gender roles as wives and mothers. Emphasis on "hard work and simple living" expressed a quintessential virtue for all Japan's citizens.[52]

Also factoring into undermining these state-imposed gender roles was the emergence of consumer culture, made possible by the increasing industrialization and the short economic boom that the First World War resulted in. Although perhaps incongruent with intellectual feminists, consumerism went against the state ideal of 'simple living'. Going out to peruse department stores offered women an escape and exposed them to images of new women, giving them a picture of what they could be.[53]

The girls depicted in advertisements or serving as floor models in department stores – so-called 'mannequin girls' – dressed in the latest Western fashion and hairstyles, became known as the 'modern girl', a figure inextricably linked to consumerism. Soon the *moga*

[52] Sato, *The New Japanese Woman*, 16.
[53] Sato, *The New Japanese Woman*, 13-16.

gained a reputation of being superficial and hedonistic. The media loved to capitalize on the *moga*'s scandalous side, and intellectuals discussed what her role in society should be. Still, the *moga* was rather undefined, since there was no consensus amongst intellectuals, and she did not speak for herself, unlike the *atarashii onna* of, for example, the Bluestocking Society.[54] As mentioned before, even the women who worked dressed in Western styles preferred to wear kimono on their own time, only stepping into the role of *gāru* while at work. Rather than being an existing figure, the *moga* was an imaginative ideal, a spectacle in the Debordian sense. In his chapter *Separation Perfected*, Debord describes the 'spectacle' as follows:

> The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images.[55]

This fact is underlined by Kon Wajirō's aforementioned 1925 survey of the Ginza. Nearly absent from the supposed home-turf of the *moga*, those few girls dressed in her image are sure to have stirred up the imagination of those beholding them.

Despite the lack of actual tangible *moga*, the media was full of articles on her. Although the image of the *moga* was one associated with many behaviours which broke taboos and social norms, certain intellectuals found her disappointing. Where the new woman had rallied to improve her social position, the *moga* had no such intentions. As such, certain people argued that she was not really modern at all, only being interested in modernity's most superficial form. About this, Sato writes:

> Their elitism mirrored their hostility toward consumerism and their inability to see the modern girl in her role as a modern construct.[56]

This touches upon the instability of the term 'modernity'. Some saw the *moga* as 'bourgeois', someone rooted in consumerism with no ties to labour. No girl who had to work for a living, they argued, could really be considered as such a 'modern girl'.[57] Seeing as the 'mannequin girls' and so many with similar jobs, were in the *moga*'s image, I find this curious. In fact, it was the expressive sexuality that the *moga* was so condemned for that created many of the jobs of the women in the professional working woman-category. Dressed in Western clothes and in many cases referred to as *gāru* (mannequin girl, bus girl, taxi girl, etcetera), these

[54] Sato, *The New Japanese Woman*, 45-48.
[55] Guy Debord, "Separation Perfected," in *The Society of the Spectacle*, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 2005), 12.
[56] Sato, *The New Japanese Woman*, 68.
[57] Sato, *The New Japanese Woman*, 70-71.

women were hired either as “sexual accoutrements” in the workplace, or as “commercial come-ons”, often not having much of a utilitarian function.[58] And yet, people were in a panic about the encroaching sexual depravity that *moga* partook in, illustrating the phenomenon with sensationalised tales in magazines. One such example was a story of an Englishman who was caught liaising, so to speak, with a young girl with short hair and western clothes. A testimony of a maid pointed out, however, that the man in question had girls over on a regular basis, most of whom were dressed in Japanese kimono and had long hair.[59] This of course begs the question: to what extent can we correlate clothing to one’s identity as “modern”?

Something which Sato does not mention, but Milhaupt does, is the notion that a woman wearing the latest kimono styles and having her hair and accessories styled according to the latest Western fashions, could be considered just as much a *moga* as someone wearing Western style dress.[60] This is also represented in advertisements, a wonderful example of which is the poster by Sugiura Hisui announcing the opening of the Ginza branch of the Mituskoshi Department store (see image 10). On it, the opening of the new Mitsukoshi store in Ginza is announced in white and red letters hovering over the art deco building 銀座三越・四月十日開店 (‘Ginza Mituskoshi, store opening April 10th’). Below, the crowds are strolling on the sidewalk and cars and trams are shown, while on the foreground three women and a young boy are shown. The boy and one of the women are dressed in Western style clothes, while the two other women wear trendy kimono and have their hair in fashionable waves, with red lipstick on and on women is holding a clutch handbag. It must have been a confusing time to be a woman in the Taishō period, living in a society where women were made the preservers of tradition on one hand, and the face of modernity on the other hand. Dressing in modern style kimono, with the latest Western hairstyles, makeup and accessories seems to have been the compromise that allowed for modernity yet did not put one at risk of being controversial. Even Naomi, the protagonist of Tanizaki’s eponymous novel, despite being the quintessential *moga*, wore kimono when going to the Jazz club. [61] It is also important to remember that not everyone has the desire to be modern. Milhaupt writes “The ‘ordinary woman’ (*tada no onna*) wore kimono patterns that were traditional and familiar so as not to draw attention to herself.”[62] Just like not every woman you see out on the street

[58] Sato, *The New Japanese Woman*, 119-121.
[59] Sato, *The New Japanese Woman*, 62-63, 66.
[60] Milhaupt, *Kimono*, 104.
[61] Sato, *The New Japanese Woman*, 46, 51.
[62] Milhaupt, *Kimono*, 104.

nowadays is interested in being on the cutting edge of fashion, the majority of women probably wore fairly plain kimono on a daily basis, perhaps choosing for a more colourful design on a special occasion.

Image 10 : Sugiura Hisui, Mitsukoshi Department Store, Ginza Branch, ca. 1930.

Real Lives: The Self-sufficient Housewives and the Professional Working Women

The previous part already touched upon the reality of some of the middle class working women. As opposed to the *moga* icon, though perhaps inspired by her, these women were real, tangible people, backed up by statistics. The Tokyo City Employent Bureau for Women (*Tokyo-shi fujin shokugyō shōkaijō*) was specifically set up for the professional working woman – another testament to her existence – and in 1926 the so-called *Japan Labour Almanac* estimated that 865.078 professional working women were employed throughout Japan (which is weirdly specific for an estimate).[63]

Women working was not a new phenomenon. Many women laboured in factories, facilitating much of the nation's industrial advancements. A 1928 source about women's suffrage states that (at that time) 60 percent of all industrial labourers were women.[64] What set the professional working woman apart from the lower class working women was their education. The women considered as professional working women had at least graduated from a four-year women's higher school, and were deemed part of the *new middle class* that had emerged. Most of these women sought positions as sales clerks or office workers, and others worked as telephone operators, nurses, teachers, or bus girls. As mentioned, a lot of women were hired merely for their appearance and certain positions were referred to with the world *gāru*, which held sexual undertones. No doubt, this was in large part due to their *moga*-appearance. The novelty of women and men working in the same space caused quite a stir, and people were worried about sexual morality. Some people were convinced that women working amongst men were bound to lead promiscuous lifestyles, associated as they were with the modern girl, who was "the symbol of consumerism, [who] epitomized women's susceptibility to their personal whims, with sexual misconduct only one of the consequences."[65] It seems that to dress in Western clothing was to associate oneself with a certain lifestyle which many did not regard favourably. As such, it is no wonder that even Yamakawa Kikue (1890-1980), socialist feminist and progressive thinker, when questioned about Western style dress, stated that although she thought the styles seemed very practical, coming into contact with a lot of 'old guard types', she and her cohorts would be in trouble if they were to be seen as *new women*.[66]

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[63] Sato, *The New Japanese Woman*, 115.
[64] Kikue Ide, "History and Problems of the Women's Suffrage Movement in Japan (1928)" in *Documenting First Wave Feminisms*, edited by Maureen Moynagh and Nancy Forestell, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 156.
[65] Sato, *The New Japanese Woman*, 73.
[66] Sato, *The New Japanese Woman*, 60, 116, 118-119, 123-124.

The increase in women seeking employment was by many intellectuals seen as an 'awakening' and a wish to become independent. Although there is sure to have been a number of women to whom this applied, the large majority of women worked for economic reasons. Surveys to gauge women's reasons for seeking employment show that more than 80 percent of the women wanted to work either to "supplement family-income" or for "economic independence". The latter could be read not just as a wish to be entirely independent, but in many cases, girls wanted to relieve their family's burden by not depending on them financially. For about the remaining fifth of professional working women, the reasons for seeking employment included self-cultivation and preparation for marriage. [67]

The Taishō period saw a boom of self-cultivation. For intellectuals such as the Bluestockings this meant studying literature and philosophy, writing and meditating, but for ordinary people it was not so much a spiritual and philosophical matter as it was simply to become a more rounded, better person. Magazines popularised self-cultivation, and some people even considered reading magazines as a form of self-cultivation. Working became to some people a way of self-cultivation by gaining important social experience. The importance of social experience as a way to prepare for marriage was also the reason for some women to get a job. Domestic skills such as cooking and sewing were no longer seen as the only way for a woman to turn herself into a suitable wife and mother.[68]

Getting married was still the firmly established path in life for women. Sato writes:

> Most single young women stopped working after marriage and handed over all economic responsibility to their husbands. The assumption that a woman's happiness was contingent on her marriage remained unchanged. Neither the hope for economic and spiritual independence nor women's fears about authoritarian mothers-in-law and family burdens was sufficient to deter them from marriage.[69]

Some people brought forth new ideas about marriage. Certain radically minded individuals saw marriage as a death-sentence for love and a form of enslavement for women. They argued for free love. Other more moderate thinkers argued for love marriages, where the two parties were mutually respected and on equal foot. Magazines featured many articles on the subject, and although marriage arranged by parents for economical compatibility was and remained the standard, hopes and expectations regarding marriage were starting to shift. Increased independence as a result of having one's own salary also played a part in some women's

[67] Sato, *The New Japanese Woman*, 131-133.
[68] Sato, *The New Japanese Woman*, 134-140.
[69] Sato, *The New Japanese Woman*, 142.

decision to forego their parents' wishes and to choose a marriage partner for love. More influential than these examples, however, were the confessional articles by fellow readers relaying thoughts and struggles of daily life. This exemplifies the important function that mass women's magazines had. Despite the fact that many scholars dismiss these magazines as unscientific and conservative, they provided space for women to consider changing identities and their role in society. The content of the magazines – comprised of so-called family articles, trendy articles and confessional articles – ranged from conservative to modern, catering to a broad audience of women. Articles about the latest trends or the sensationalised accounts of *moga* escapades likely did not influence the young women reading them much, as they did not really consider this an attainable lifestyle. Confessional articles however, written by other readers of the women's magazines, served an essential role in creating a sense of community for women and to grant them a space to develop new perspectives on matters of their daily lives. Articles on domestic work, although they might seem as perpetuating gender stereotypes, served to empower housewives and made them into experts in their own field.[70]

What Actually Changed?

Considering all this, can we say that things actually fundamentally changed for women during the Taishō period? One thing that affected almost everyone was the emergence of consumer culture. Although not everyone could actually afford to buy much, they could watch and dream. The visual culture of consumerism provided a perspective, something to hope for. Mass media also aided in the spread of the imagery and discourse surrounding the new culture. The new middle class had the means to buy newspapers and magazines at the very least, thanks to their white-collar jobs. The professional working woman joined these ranks.

Women who worked for a living was nothing new. The difference was the mingling of women and men in workplaces. This challenged existing gender roles, and many office ladies and sales girls were subjected to being sexualized and objectified. Although the fact that this occurred in a public sphere was new, the objectification of women is decidedly not and many preceding examples can be given for this, of which the popularity of *bijinga* (pictures of beautiful women) and ukiyo-e (pictures of the floating world, in other words, the pleasure quarters) in the Edo period is just one. Although the salary granted a measure of independence to working women, it was less than half of what men were being paid, and combined with the fact that getting married was still firmly cemented in the collective conscious as a woman's

[70] Sato, *The New Japanese Woman*, 80, 82-83, 88-89, 102-105, 108, 141

purpose in life, it is no wonder that most women would not forego a marriage to continue working as an independent woman.

Thoughts on marriage and home life were starting to shift. Some extreme examples were gladly published in magazines, but for many women something so out of the norm was not something they would ever consider. As Sato puts it: "The modern girl, the housewife and the professional working woman had neither the desire nor the intention to clash with the system in the 1920s. They shunned radical change."[71] The chapter "Mode Becomes Modern: Meiji to Twenty-First Century*"* in *The Social Life of Kimono: Japanese Fashion Past and Present* by Sheila Cliff provides some more examples that prove this. She writes that in the Taishō period, sewing machines were marketed to women as symbols of modernity but the fact that kimono, traditionally sewed by hand and taken apart to be cleaned, could not be sewn by machine and women 'could not be persuaded to change from kimono to western dress'. Cliff writes:

> Native fashion continued to fulfill the need of practicality and was aesthetically pleasing clothing for Japanese women. […] The trend was not to change from Japanese to Western dress, but rather to integrate new imported colors into kimono aesthetics, producing far brighter formal wear than had been popular before.[72]

Western clothes (*yōfuku*) were sold to the Japanese on account of them being practical and modern, but this did not suddenly make the kimono they had been wearing for centuries *impractical*. To say that women in the 1920s suddenly embraced modernity as it was displayed in the media would be an illusion. However, exposure to these different possibilities was food for thought that continued to steep in the minds of women, connected as they were through mass women's magazines and other media. All of these ideas set the tone for change in the future.

[71] Sato, *The New Japanese Woman*, 155.
[72] Sheila Cliff, "Mode Becomes Modern: Meiji to Twenty-First Century*"* in *The Social Life of Kimono: Japanese Fashion Past and Present*, 46.

In Conclusion

Responding to the research question "*How was kimono modernised in the Taishō period and how does this factor into the formulation of new female identities?"* the previous chapters expanded on the developments that changed the perspective on kimono, the way kimono were produced and sold, and the role of women in society in relation to kimono.

With the short-lived economic burst that the First World War brought forth, came a new middle class. The industrialisation of Japanese society raised the living standard of a relatively large group of people and this granted them a measure of financial leeway, which allowed for the purchasing of products like homeware and clothing. Department stores started to open in the rapidly commercialising society, and people were presented with a new way of shopping for goods. The introduction of glass display cases and distribution of goods in the store according to deliberateness changed the shopping experience to a more casual, no-strings-attached affair. Browsing department stores can be considered as a way for women to go against the state-imposed ideal of 'good wife, wise mother', as a proper housewife was expected to be frugal. Department stores also made use of the increasingly ubiquitous mass media to market their goods, propagating a brand identity for their stores and their designers, familiarising people with the unfamiliar new styles and providing an ideal image to strive for. Department stores aimed to become arbiters of taste.

With the increased living standard and the abolishment of sumptuary laws, the customer base shifted, providing stores with new design opportunities. People could now buy whatever was within their budget and in alignment with their taste. Developments in the textile industry in the late 19th and early 20th century enabled the production of the iconic bold and colourful Taishō designs. Pébrine disease affecting the silk worms in France and Italy in the 1850s forced them to look to Asia to import their silk. To ensure the quality of this imported silk, they invested in developing the Japanese silk industry, resulting in Japan having the most advanced and substantial silk industry in the early 20th century. Weaving techniques were also imported, as well as aniline dyes that made many colours available to a large public. These influences from abroad revolutionised the Japanese textile production, and the techniques and materials were also adapted to fit Japanese practices. An example is the invention of the *kata-yūzen* technique, were rice paste mixed with dye is applied through stencils to produce patterns on fabric. This allowed for the production of multiples and thus saved money and time. The introduction of *meisen*, a sturdy yet affordable silk fabric, provided women with an affordable yet fashionable option. It became highly popular, evident

from the fact that half the women on the Ginza, the trendiest area in Tokyo, were observed to be wearing *meisen* kimono in Kon Wajiro's 1926 survey.

Although the *moga* was a much-discussed topic in the mass magazines and she was prominently featured in many advertisements and posters, the majority of women continued to wear kimono rather than switch to Western dress. There are many explanations for this. On the one hand, there was the expectation of women to be the preservers of tradition in the face of Western influences and modernisation. A woman dressed in kimono was becoming the symbol of Japanese traditional culture. Additionally, the 'good wife, wise mother' ideal had a strong influence, and although the new white collar jobs for women provided a measure of independence, marriage was still thought to be the final goal in a woman's life. Most women had no interest in radical change, but with contributions from readers, the mass women's magazines provided many women with a sense of community and a safe space to contemplate different ways of living. New thoughts on marriage were being raised, and although most women likely considered love-marriages to be too risky and arranged marriages were still the norm, desire for a more equal relationship between husband and wife was beginning to take root.

Another reason for shunning Western style clothes is likely to have been the controversial nature of the *moga* icon. *Moga* gained a reputation of being superficial and hedonistic, disappointing intellectuals who had hoped that the modern girl would have followed in the footsteps of her predecessor, the bluestocking *atarashii onna* (new woman) who rallied for gender equality. Most likely more deterring, even, was the label of promiscuity that the *moga* gained. The media capitalised on this scandalous side. With women for the first time working side by side with men, often hired purely for looks, dressed in Western style clothing, the public panicked over the virtue of young women. Even if a woman felt an attraction to modern styles, it is understanding that she might have been scared off trying Western clothing by the associations that accompanied this look.

Finally, the most practical reason for continuing to wear kimono was familiarity. Just because Western style clothing was marketed as practical, does not mean that people suddenly started experiencing the clothes they had been used to wearing for centuries as *impractical*. The kimono provided women with a canvas to express their own preferred style. Those who preferred to be inconspicuous and were perhaps a bit more conservative, could opt for small, conventional patterns. Those who were more adventurously minded could choose from an array of colours and bold patterns. Although the quintessential *moga* icon summons mental

images of a girl dressed in Western style clothes, with short bobbed or waved hair and red lipstick on, women could also be modern while wearing kimono. Combining the latest kimono designs – perhaps inspired by Western influence – with Western style make-up, hair and accessories allowed a woman to be modern yet not abandon the conventions of her culture. Whatever style she might have chosen, the kimono allowed a Taishō woman to express her identity as she pleased.

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