

JAPANESE TRADITIONAL RAIMENT IN THE ERA OF MODERNIZATION (КОНЕЦ XIX-ПЕРВАЯ ПОЛОВИНА XX СТ.)

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to provide analysis of the main tendencies of the development of Japanese traditional raiment in the end of XIX – early XX c.c. A special attention is paid to the establishment of completely new series of images and motifs in textile and accessories design, which was due to the success in country's modernization and the reshaping of the national identity. The present article provides the analysis of the results of the social division cancelling reforms and the gist of the new dress code and its meaning for Japanese Culture.

Keywords: Japanese Traditional Raiment, Meiji reforms, the Modernization of Japan

INTRODUCTION

There was less research dedicated to Japanese traditional raiment of the end of the XIX- early XX c.c. than to that of pre-modernization era. The historians pay great attention to changes in the way kimono was worn, the traits of the design, and the technological aspects. The following researchers stand out: Fujii Kenzo¹, Ikutani Yoshio², Maruyama Nobuhiko³, Nagasaki Iwao⁴, Jackson A⁵, Dusenbury M.⁶ and others. For instance Fujii Kenzo, Yuko Fukatsu-Fukuoka, Keiko Kobayashi and various others emphasize the role Japanese delegations in Europe have played in modernization of textile technique and technology. Yuko Fukatsu-Fukuoka wrote: «After the Meiji Restoration of 1868, the design and technique of yuzen dramatically changed, and created a new fashion not only among the wealthy but also among middle class women. Behind this evolution stand significant influences of Western textile technology, as well as changes of the social system of Japan» [p.406]. Keiko Kobayashi mentions that the interest in a small and precise pattern in kasuri, which first appeared in the Edo era, would not come true if it was not for mastering of the western technology [p.392].

Fuji Kenzo in his study of Japanese style of XX c. emphasises the influence Art Nouveau style had on the evolution of Japanese textile: «The influence of Art Nouveau, the art

¹ Fujii, Kenzo. Japanese Modern Textiles. Kyoto: Kyotoshojin, 1993; Yamanobe, Tomoyuki. Fujii, Kenzo. *Kyoto Modern Textiles: 1868-1940*. Kyoto: Kyoto Textile Wholesalers Association, 1996.

² Ikutani, Yoshio. *Kata-yuzen no gihou*. Tokyo: Rikogakusha, 1996.

³ Maruyama = 丸山信彦 「友禪染」 京都 一九九三年 九六頁。(Maruyama, Nobuhiko. *Yuzen dyeing*. Kyoto, 1993)

⁴ 長崎巖 「着物と模様：日本の形と色」 東京 一九九九年 三三三頁。(Nagasaki Iwao. *Kimono and patterns (Japanese form and color)*. Tokyo, 1999)

⁵ Jackson, A. *Japanese Textiles in the Victoria and Albert Museum*. London, 2000.

⁶ Dusenbury, Mary. Kasuri, *Beyond the Tanabata Bridge, Traditional Japanese Textiles*, pp. 57-74. Edited by William Jay Rathbun. Thames and Hudson, London. 1993.

movement which spread throughout Europe in the late 19th century, reached Japan as a result of Japans participation in the 1890 International Exposition in Paris. Innovative designs inspired by Art Nouveau appeared in Japanese textiles produced in the late Meiji and Taisho eras».

It is often stated that the Meiji era saw finalization of the kimono as a single ensemble, perpetuating it as a national costume. However, it is this particular era when new textile designs evolve, traditional techniques are enriched as well as the material basis. These innovations are subject of the presented article.

Results. The Meiji reforms provided for the disbandment of *samuraidom* as a class, depriving them of their time-honoured privileges. In an instant, a mighty military cast found itself 'overboard' the country's history. The ban on public appearance in full array with a broad *hakama*, a peculiar plait, and two swords in the waistband sent the image of the wearer into the realm of household folklore. The advent of the European formal suit came to symbolize a 'new' Japan poised to modernize.

However, the insular textile industry alone was in no capacity to meet the challenges of the on-going costume reform. The Japanese had no experience in tailoring the European-style suit, let alone mass-producing it, which rendered it into imported merchandise, a luxury or status-symbol affordable only to high rank officials. The majority of the population had to avail themselves with the traditional kimono, combining it with a western-style head-and/or-footwear. Absence of pockets with the traditional costume accounted, therefore, for a stable demand in usual waistband-attached accessories: a *netsuke* (a bibelot in the form of a miniature sculpture), a smoking pipe, an ashtray, an inkpot, etc. The numbers of accessory-makers even multiplied on the account of former armour manufacturers, those involved in furnishing swords, mail armour and weapon adornments, and who were left temporarily unemployed. It was in this time that there appeared a multitude of *netsuke* distinguished by the virtuoso metal cast techniques. Apart from the craftsmanship, masters in arms enriched the *netsuke* subject matter repertoire with new motifs: casting the accessory in the shape of a samurai helmet, or *tsuba*, or knife.

Nostalgia for the *samurai* past can also be traced down to the fashion of carrying long, metal-cast smoking pipes, which, when attached to the waistband, would cause the *haori* flaps to bulge out thus reminiscent of the usual silhouette of a *samurai* with swords in his *obi*.

Japan's ambitions of the time reached as far as establishing itself as equal with the then European community dominated by great imperial powers, which (alongside tangible industrial achievements) envisaged transforming an insular state into a mighty empire with subjugated colonies – all these calling for an advanced army. The army reform was also necessitated by a general situation in Asia which by that time had been largely colonized by the Western powers. One way to prevent a looming colonization and to have the unfair trade treaties with the European and American parties reconsidered was through the rapid modernization of the economy in general and the armed forces in particular. The country's interior situation also called for an urgent military build-up. The *Satsuma* insurrection under *Saigō Takamori (Takanaga)* (1827-1877) against the new order and enforced cultivation of European culture, though ruthlessly suppressed, elevated *Saigō Takamori* to the rank of a national hero. The then fashion responded with the raiment easily associated with the hero in disgrace with the central government, i.e., *satsuma-kasuri* ornament and olive-brown shade, *uguisu-tya*, also known as *Saigō's* colours.

Although the *Meiji* government deprived the samurais of their centuries-old privileges, the political *realia* of the late nineteenth century and, in particular, the country's far reaching

imperial ambitions dictated the revival of samurai virtues such as unquestioning loyalty and preparedness for self-sacrifice in the name of Emperor. Not surprisingly, far from falling into oblivion, the *bushido* code of conduct began to be intensely reintroduced in the Japanese army. Two decades after his death, in 1877, *Saigō Takamori* was given a free pardon. The posthumous rehabilitation also awaited the 47 *ronin* as well as the clan's head, *Asano Naganori* (1675 - 1701). In this context one should recognize as timely the arrival of *Tsukioka Yoshitoshi's* (1839-1892) graphic series dedicated to the heroes of Japan, in which the colour prints seemed to revive such historical figures as *Saigō Takamori* in the image of the Spirit Insulted calling for vengeance or the legendary archer and rebel *Minamoto no Tametomo* (1139-1170)¹.

The atmosphere of heroization of historical characters renowned for their loyalty to the Emperor revived a keen interest in the character of *Nitta Yoshisada* (1301-1338), a legendary warrior in service with the *Emperor Go-Daigo* (1288-1339) during the feud with the Ashikaga clan. One of the numerous legends surrounding his life relates about his death as follows: when surrounded by the enemies, the gallant warrior undauntedly severed his own head in order not to be taken prisoner – the episode which served as a motif for the newly-arrived fashion in netsuke with a naturalistic imagery of *Nitta's* severed head. A grimace of death, protruding tongue and gore... one could hardly imagine all these as a fashion in accessory for everyday wear, however, for the soldiers at the Sino-Japanese war, the sight of heads cut was as common as that of blood, the reason being that although the Japanese army had transferred to fire arms, the officers did not abandon the habit of carrying swords, for beheading the smitten enemy was still a common practice in Asia. It should not come as a surprise that the military then gladly decorated their purses, backpacks and *sagemono* with netsukes like that. Characteristically, in a private interview with the author of this article, the prior of the *Yasukuni* temple confirmed the popularity of such symbols with the military of the time and on display in the temple's museum collection is a battle flag with an image of a skull, which used to symbolize the soldier's devotion to the Emperor and resolution to lay down his own life for him².

Undeniable success in the country's modernization, as well as victorious wars on China and Russia caused re-evaluation of the national costume. At the beginning of the *Meiji* reforms, which, among others, established the European costume as an official formal wear, the Japanese traditional raiment fell in decline as symbolic of the time gone and, thus, a sign of provinciality. Conversely, what was seen as a symbol of progress and development in male fashion was the European civilian suit or a military uniform. However, women's clothes, kimono, was looked on as symbolic of the motherland, family and the clan as a whole, all of them expecting a worthy service of a soldier. Not surprisingly, it was the image of a female wearing a kimono that was operational in visual rhetoric of the time.

The new policy found its reflection in kimono design. For example, a pattern based on the repeated images of palmers ascending Mount Fuji, complemented with the imagery of samurai swords, symbolized stamina in overcoming difficulties and determination to fight for the motherland.

¹ The image of *Minamoto no Tametomo*, who, for his participation in a conspiracy, was sent into exile on island *Oshima*, *Izu* archipelago, and then raised another rebellion and was believed to have been the first to commit *seppuku*, was eagerly capitalized on by ideologists. According to one of the legends, he did not perish, but fled to *Ryukyu*, where he got married and became father to Shunten, thus the founder of the first royal dynasty. In the late 19th century, the legend served as the justification of the *Ryukyu* annexure, as *Tametomo* belonged to the *Minamoto* branch, to follow ancestry from Emperor *Seiwa*

² The interview was held in March 2011

With the passage of time the ideological message in the kimono décor became only amplified at the expense of the imagery ‘borrowed’ from poster graphics. In this vein, a set of postcards from the time of the Russo-Japanese war became a common décor pattern on men’s *tsuba*, with pictures scattered over the cloth visually linked together with the lines of text messages. The postcards and supporting texts describe the main stages in Japan’s modernization including the opening of such as *Ryojun* (Port Arthur) opening; the ceremony at the opening of the first railroad; *Count Iwakura Tomomi’s* (1825-1883) mission leaving Yokohama; the 30th anniversary of the relocation of the capital from Kyoto to Tokyo.

One sample of a *tsuba* features scenes related to the Russo-Japanese war, beginning from the siege and ending with the naval battle.

Portraits of the Japanese ministers and army generals intermittent with the imagery of samurai helmets sometimes accompanied with the ‘banzai’ slogan were also common in kimono decor. Other visual narratives could refer to the progress in modernization or otherwise convey the war monger spirit.

In the 1930th the government ventured significant restructuring: many significant politicians and industrialists were removed from power and as a result of the 1936 coup d’état the military came ascended. On the wave of the victorious war campaigns in China, Korea, and Taiwan, Japan concluded the treaty with the Nazi Germany and began the preparation for the warfare in the Pacific region. The decades of the military reforms saw the arrival of a new, modernized army equipped with the most sophisticated materiel, but unflinchingly resulted in the weakened economy. The economic factors, it transpired, were no less important for “The Great Japanese Empire” project, than the mere urge to catch up with the West. The patriotic slogans and the feel of the nation as one entity were meant to make up for the limitations and deprivations incurred by rapid modernization.

The propaganda began to resort to the visual images of Japan’s glorious past to convey the sacred tradition of a loyal and self-devoted service. Illustrative in this context was the décor of one of male’s *haori*, featuring the picture of *Amaterasu Ise Grand Shrine*, the key *Shinto* religious site in Japan, and a cartouche with the lines: “The ascend or decline of the Empire depends on this one battle. Any of the Empire’s subjects must strive for the victory.” Performed in silk thread, the picture acquires the force of a war poster with a clear messaging and prioritizing and an understandable call for action. Noteworthy is also the fact, that the visual message carries an intimate appeal not so much to a second-party viewer, but to the wearer himself, as it adorns the silken lining of the *haori*.

In content, the mentioned message is a differently worded version of the well-known order issued by one of the most charismatic figures in English history, Admiral *Horatio Nelson* (1758-1805). This order was first voiced on the eve of the Trafalgar Battle, 36 years after it was repeated almost word-for-word by Admiral Togo (1848-1934) at the Tsushima battle.

In the course of time, a propaganda subtext acquired a new sounding in the kimono décor. For example, in 1930s there appeared festive kimonos for boys with an image of an airplane, whose dark blue wings proudly displayed the red sun disk – the Japanese air forces coat of arms. The ‘iron birds’ mighty silhouette is balanced by medallions which contain graphic depictions of Mount Fuji, London’s Tower Bridge, a piece of world map, and the French and British flags.

The mentioned kimono ‘chronicles’ a historic event – the first direct flight from Japan to Europe, performed by *Masaaki Inuma* (1912-1941) and *Kenji Tsukagoshi* (1900-1943). This motif also had a quite ‘transparent’ propaganda subtext: for Japanese people, progress was

exemplified by urbanization, industrialization and military build-up. These technical achievements showed the big victories of Japan who had caught up with the western world's leading countries. Hence, the urban landscapes with intense car and tram traffic, subway tunnels and airplanes hovering over the map of the Japanese Empire, the annexed territories in particular (the islands of Taiwan and Okinawa, Korea and Manchuria later) established the idea of pan Asian prosperity. The content and style of the then kimono design concepts convey the spirit, imagery and subject matter of the propaganda posters with the images of smiling Asian children, or the world map with the Japanese fighter bombers' flight radii printed on it. After passing the 1938 total mobilization law the propaganda machine was launched into full flight. The kimono design became empathetically militarized. There appeared *ukatas* adorned with the rhythmically placed silhouettes of soldiers, war material and the likes.

Military ornaments feature in not only the male clothes, but also female and children's garments. Adornments that were out of character for children appeared as a consequence of the new education concept, that placed above all – the upbringing of patriotism, obedience, fighting samurai spirit, self-sacrifice for the name of the state, loyalty to the Emperor. Thus appeared the numerous children's kimonos with a distinctive central ornament: a huge Japanese fighting jet with the red sun disks on its wings soaring above the clouds.

The legendary heroes also conveyed the new concept of childhood as a preliminary stage for the army service in the life of a human. One figure in the recommended literature is the fairy tale boy Momotaro, famed for his dexterity and strength, which with his friends fought demons. Clad in a child's armour, decorated with a peach-styled helmet and with a sword. *Momotaro* became one of the most famous characters in miniature plastic arts. His image also found reflection in children's fashion. No less popular in boys' 'clothes' design were *Yoshitsune* (1159-1189) and *Benkei* (1155-1189) – historical figures famed for their martial skills. Noteworthy, the semi-mythical characters are presented by designers in the spirit of modernity: the heroes are depicted in medieval armour with a sword and the Navy colours against the background of airplanes, steamers and falling bombs.

The warfare called for ideological support. There was a need for new, modern heroes besides the historical and fairy tale ones. The hero of Port Arthur, *Admiral Togo*, whose portraits and scenes of Russian Fleet's destruction under his command ornate men's jackets and kimonos, was recognized as such. After the Russo-Japanese war, general *Nogi* (1849-1912) was included into the national heroes pantheon. *Yoshiko Inui* refers to the textile samples that have the "General Nogi's meeting with the Russian General" as their subject.¹ "The Russian general" probably refers to the General Adjutant A. M. Stessel (1848-1915). His meeting with *General Nogi* after the surrender of Port Arthur served as a subject for numerous lithographs that were in circulation in Japan and Russia.

The largest part of the kimonos depicting the motifs mentioned above was produced in 1930s to match the thirtieth anniversary of the Russo-Japanese war. It was then that war heroes started to serve as role-models. Those were found in the person of three private engineers of the 84th regiment, *Takeji Eshita* (1910-1932), *Inosuke Sakue* (1910-1932) and *Yuzuru Kitagawa* (1910-1932). During the battle of Shanghai in 1932 they perished while trying to blow up enemy barbed wire field, blowing up 34 enemy soldiers and opening the venue of approach for the friendly troops. The deed has been subject to discussion and the rumor has it, that there might have been accidental deaths of soldiers, who wrongly used the demolition device. It is important is that the propaganda exploited the death of the soldiers to picture

¹ Inui Yoshiko. *Images of War; kimono*. Tokyo, 2007.

them as folk heroes to go down in Japan's history. The incident (with the heroic death in the end) reflected in the motif of the "three soldiers" who made their way into history as the subject of songs, radio plays, cartoons, movies and stage plays. Naturally, the imagery was also made use of in the kimono design, featuring in everything from *jubans* to women's sashes and dresses.

The military actions in China, which recommenced since 1931, coincided with a period of innovation and experiments in the kimono designs. The Japanese Army's success was widely recognized and found quick reflection in the kimono designs of the time. The Japanese soldiers depicted as standing on the Great Wall of China made their way to become a common motif for men's kimono during the war.

In female clothes the military theme is less manifested. Usually females that wanted to show solidarity with the army, tied their obis with embroidered images of ships, airplanes, bombs. Non-feminine motifs in garments can be explained by the general surge of patriotism and mass propaganda that appealed to the common Japanese fold from the numerous posters, big screens, postcards etc. However, more often used in female clothes were traditional motifs that gained patriotic connotations? For instance, the images of sakura in blossom and Mount Fuji were supplemented with the national and military colours. Lines from the national anthem formed the décor, joining with the depictions of the chrysanthemums. The combination can be easily interpreted as follows: the lines of the state anthem convey the message of praise of and faith to the Emperor, whereas the chrysanthemum symbolized the *mon* (coat of arms) of the Royal House. It would not be an exaggeration to note, that the national colors, or their symbolic representation, *hinomaru* fans were the most popular motif in clothes design.

The modernization of the country disbanded the social stratification of the Chinese dress code, with its rigid regimentation of fabrics, colors and contours, which arrived in Japan on the train of Confucianism. The code allowed for easy orientation in the 'senior/junior' and 'superior/inferior' dichotomy. The *Meiji* reforms meliorated the existing ranks making all items of clothing equally accessible to the entire society. *Hakama*, which initially was aristocratic clothing, became the official outwear of teachers and students. That is why the *Taisho* period reminds the Japanese of a woman in *hakama*.

However, the disbandment of the outdated social ranking system brought forth such new concepts as *reiso* (the appropriate, or polite, clothing) and *kimono-no kaku* (level of clothing). The new division classifies all clothing as *reiso* or "other than *reiso*". Within the *reiso*, all kimonos fall into discernable ranks as to the color, kind of pattern and number of coats of arms in the given family.

The 'level' of a kimono must correspond to that of the event it is worn to, as a kimono per se, in Japanese culture, is one way of establishing tacit rapport and creating a harmonious atmosphere. As was observed by Yu. M. Lotman, 'one feature of fashion is that it is always targeted at a certain addressee: either the wearer or the beholder'¹. The latter is typical of the Japanese approach to clothing as recognizing the priority of 'the other'. Therefore, the choice of clothing is not so much a matter of own preference but a dictate of the society, thus reflecting the image of one's 'self' in the eyes of the others. As distinct from Europe, where clothing is a means of manifesting one's individuality, in Japan it is a medium of establishing universal harmony.

¹ Лотман, М.Ю. *Непредсказуемые механизмы культуры*. Таллин, 2010. P. 82. (Lotman M.Y. *Unpredictable mechanisms of culture*. Tallinn, 2010. P. 82.)

CONCLUSIONS

The period of study is marked with co-existent and yet controversial tendencies: the introduction of European raiment as official and the end of national costume complex establishment; the abortion of the traditional dress-code and the establishment of the new one; the influence of the European Art Nouveau style; the disbandment of the samuraidom and the appeal to the samurai traditions and values. Militaristic motifs are first studied in modernization context, then - as demonstration of patriotic spirit.

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