

Evolution of Japanese Style

JAPN 310: Japanese Cinema

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Throughout Japanese films, whether it is from parent to child or best friends Japan has been, and will continue to be, an ever changing melting pot of fashion. This essay will describe the ways and why Japan's fashion is has changed so drastically over the years. Japan's style has been influenced by many different cultures over the years, Western and French style being the most influential. This is of course after the pre-war era when the main style of dress were yukata or kimono.

Ugetsu is the first movie I plan to evaluate. Ugetsu was produced in 1953 and takes place in sixteenth century Japan. This is a time in Japan where the main and only style of dress were yukata and kimonos as Japan was still a closed nation and did not experience influences in style from other places. In the late sixteen century, people were separated by different caste systems of samurai and lower classes. This is the same in Ugetsu where it shows both the poor families and shows the differences in dress between the poor and Lady Wakasa who is obviously affluent.

Traditional Japanese clothing for the poor during this time period were typically very plain yukatas. A yukata is a type of very light kimono that is designed for outdoor and indoor use that is worn similar to a bathrobe. Used by both men and woman, yukatas were typically worn around the house and for day to day things (Innovation Japanese Style : A Cultural and Historical Perspective, 1995). Yukata were typically worn by the poor because they are much less extravagant than kimono and were more readily available for every day use. Although the garb of the past may have not been called yukata at the time, they show a striking resemblance to the yukata of modern times.

Men in the late sixteenth century Japan wore typically the same thing as woman of the same time. They, however, would wear more masculine versions of each kimono or yukata. The

nobleman would wear clothes that were made more of silk and fancier patterns whereas the less affluent men wore plain clothes. Generally, the poorer man wore a thin and only one layered kimono on the everyday basis. On the other hand, samurai men wore more extravagant and more expensive clothes and in the sixteenth century most samurai wore hitatare as well. Hitatare is a little different from a kimono in that there are two pieces to it that more of the affluent samurai wore.

Out of all of the films that we had watched in class Ugetsu showed style in social classes the best. Lady Wakasa, the enchantress, wore very heavy and layered silk kimonos which showed that she had more money than the other people around her. In that time in Japan, the style of dress you wore was a way of showing what social caste you belonged to. A good and new kimono was a way of showing that you were at the top of the social ladder because in the late sixteenth century when this film was taking place, kimono shops did not really exist. In order to make a kimono, you need to have it made specifically for you. Therefore, the less affluent people in these days often went to second hand shops to wear kimono, whereas the noble people wore fresh kimonos made just for them.

These different types of styles that are seen in early Japan were seen almost up until Japan started industrializing itself. Even in the modern day, one can see a clear caste system in the clothes that people wear. Take for instance, a person wearing a designer shirt may be seen as more affluent than a person wearing clothes from a discounted department store.

After the World War II era came to a close, Japanese began using more and more westernized style in their every day dress. The movie that showed the beginnings of the transition the best was Ozu's Tokyo Story which followed an elderly couple trying to visit their

children in Tokyo. This film takes place in the 1950's and shows the generation gap between young and old flawlessly. Although we do see the father wearing a western style suit we never see the mother wearing anything but a simple yukata. This film shows the beginnings of *yofuku* and *wafuku* which are Western and Japanese style clothes.

In the opening of the film, we see the parents packing for Tokyo in their humble home in a country side town: both wearing traditional Japanese yukata. These yukata are the more modern form of Edo's yukata. This means that people wore these style yukata while doing day to day things, not just in the bath houses. Kimono were worn less in post-war Japan, although it was not entirely unlikely to see someone in a kimono. Take for instance, the funeral scenes were most everyone is seen in a lovely and heavily layered kimono. Unlike in Edo, these kimono were much easier to come by although not cheap.

Kimono in post-war Japan were seen as something to wear during special occasions. The ideal of only wearing nice kimono during special occasions continues to modern day, as we will discuss in relation to the movie Departures. It is also hinted that kimono were still sought after as something special when one of the daughters says that she will take the late mother's nice kimono. However, it is typical to see only woman in these special kimono rather than men who at this time would wear Western style suits.

Even though most people in post-war Japan wore *yofuku* or Western style clothing, yukata and kimono were worn to do very "Japanese" things. For example, when the children send their parents to spend time in the bath house, we see the parents as well as other younger guests wearing cotton yukata. These yukata are worn in the bath houses because the thin cotton takes away the perspiration from the bath. In modern times, people still wear yukata in some of

the bath houses of Japan, I think it is to give thanks to the past and to show how deeply rooted the Japanese people are.

The *yofuku* of post-war Japan were much like the American clothes of the same time. The woman would wear shin to ankle length skirts that were very conservative. Typically the woman would wear these long skirts and a nice button up blouse whereas the men would wear long pants with a nice shirt. It was not often seen in the film that men would wear anything less formal than a suit like garb. There was a pair of long pants, a button up shirt, and a nice blazer that was sometimes accompanied by a neck tie.

One of my favorite scenes in the entire film is when Noriko and Shukichi are standing outside of the home. Noriko wearing Western style clothing and Shukichi is wearing a Japanese yukata. This is the strongest scene to me that shows the distinction between *wafuku* and *yofuku*. These two people, although the closest emotionally to each other, show the strongest amount of difference in styles of dress in this scene. Very rarely in the film was Noriko seen in anything but her teacher's uniform of her long skirt and button up blouse and only in a few scenes is Shukichi seen in a Western style suit. Although strong, the Western-American influence was not the only style of dress that Japan modeled themselves after.

Kamikaze Girls, a modern day Japanese film, shows three very different styles that are now seen spread throughout Japan. The first, and maybe the most bizarre, being the lolita style that the main protagonist wears every day. The second is the yanki style, and the third is the typical Japanese housewife style of the modern day.

Momoko, a lolita crazed girl, explains that she thinks she was born in the wrong place at the wrong time. She goes on to explain more in depth that she belongs in the Rococo Era of

France. The Rococo period of France is often referred to as the late Baroque period. As many people have seen or heard, the Baroque period of France and European countries of the like feature the wispy and artistic movement of the eighteenth century citizens. The art, architecture, and clothing of the Rococo period featured creamy, pastel-like colors, asymmetrical designs, and curves throughout. This type of style is mostly seen in the form of “sweet lolita” which is what Momoko wears. However, sweet lolita is not the only type of lolita typically seen in modern day Japan. These other types of lolita (ei: gothic lolita, wa-lolita, and classic lolita) also stem from European styles and the Rococo period.

Ichigo, who is the second protagonist in Kamikaze Girls, is on the totally opposite spectrum of Japanese style. She wears clothes that are defined as “yanki” or the similar “Bosozoku”. Yanki is categorized as any individual that identifies themselves as the working class or someone that apposes the norm (usually in high school). Ichigo wears things that are typical yanki: the long jacket, white binding on the chest, and a generally haphazardly thrown together outfit. She also has the very stereotypical yanki customized motorcycle.

The style of yanki was derived from classic American biker gangs in the 1950s. However, as time has passed, the typical yanki style has been influenced mostly by Japanese hip-hop (Japan Fashion Now, 2010). The style of the typical school attending yanki is a customized school uniform and the general disregard for authority.

Although these two extreme styles do exist in modern day Japan, they do not represent the majority of Japanese styles today. In Kamikaze Girls some of the other people in the film talk about how they go to *Jusco*, a department store that can be seen all throughout Japan. Most of the

common people in Japan wear Western clothing that can be found at any department store. In general, people wear modern Western clothes such as pants, t-shirts, skirts etc.

The film Be With You, a film that we did not watch in class, there is only Western style clothing seen. The film was made in 2004, thus is a very modern film and portrays many modern stylistics of Japanese clothing.

Takumi, the main protagonist of the movie wears several different types of clothes: work and play. When it comes to modern day work clothes in Japan, there is a lot more social stigmas that are held. For example, Takumi wears the same suit year-round to work and his coworker tries to hint at him that it is the wrong time to wear a certain suit. Because of the extreme weather changes throughout Japan during the seasons, there are different types of clothing for each time of the year. One would not wear a light summer suit in the winter because of the harsh weather changes. The clothes which I label as “play” are often clothes that one would buy at a store such as Jusco. They are normal t-shirts, pants, and sometimes shorts.

Yuji, Takumi’s son, wore Westernized clothes and also specific clothes for someone of his age. Because Yuji is only six years-old, he is shown going to elementary school in his uniform. Throughout Japan, school uniforms are a highly used form of fashion mostly because a student goes to school five days a week for several hours a day, therefore it is not often that these students develop their own personal style. Elementary students in Japan are seen wearing a yellow cap-this is so they are easier seen while walking in big groups. I feel as though this is coming from a Western influence as well. In the Edo period and beyond in Japan, it was not common to see young people going to school and in post-war period Japan there are more children and teens attending school which creates the uniform school outfit.

Takumi's wife, Mio, wears typical Western style Japanese clothing. Older women in Japan can still be seen wearing more modest clothing like the older style in Western culture. Although now the younger generation of Japan have now begun to wear the more flashy clothes of today, they still hold true to the more conservative Japanese style of post-war Japan. This can also be seen in the film, Departures.

Departures is another modern day Japanese film where most of the clothes seen are Western. The main protagonists wore Western clothing such as suits, dresses, and modest clothing. It is only when the married couple goes to the public bath house that they wear yukata, the traditional Japanese outfit. However, in this film they also show how bodies are prepared for the casket. Many older people in Japan still choose to wear traditional Japanese kimono before cremation. I think that this is because there is still Japanese culture deeply rooted in each person.

In this film, as well as many of the older films we have watched, it is shown that the style of dress one wears shows how much money the person has. Daigo and his wife both wear nice coats and clothes through out the entire film, whereas when Daigo meets his father he is wearing a simple plaid shirt and pants. This shows that Daigo has made himself such a person that would wear nice clothes and have an instrument where as his father wears modest and simple clothing.

One of the most interesting scenes in Departures was when Daigo was preparing a grandmother's body for the casket. While he was preparing to put on her traditional tabi socks, the granddaughter stops him and tells him that her grandmother wanted to wear long socks like hers. These loose long socks remind me a little bit of the cute and childish lolita and Rococo style. The Western style clothes were most often worn by the younger people in Japan, whereas the more conservative Western or even the classic Japanese yukata are worn by the older

generation. Therefore, I think that the grandmother may have always wanted to wear the styles of the younger generation but there is too much social stigma behind it. Japan is a nation that is heavily influenced by the reactions of others and how people perceive each other.

Japan has many different styles today: lolita, yanki, *wafuku*, and *yofuku* all living harmoniously within the small nation. These different styles come from several influences throughout the world from different time periods. The Rococo period of Europe and France which greatly influenced the lolita craze in Japan, the Western influence of the yanki and the typical style of dress today. Although, I believe that the Japanese still hold true to the fashion of the past with yukata and kimono frequently appearing during festivals and big events.

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