

# How the kimono represented japanese tradition and national identity and how it ha...

[Psychology](#)



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Kimono: National Identities and tradition in Japan The Kimono is a traditional Japanese garment worn by both men and women, especially during festive occasions. Influenced by Chinese fashion from as early as the 5th Century BC, the Kimono gained rapid recognition as a stylized garment through the centuries. During modern times, the Kimono has emerged as the national costume of Japan and is largely considered a feminine garment. This paper describes the transition of the Kimono as a symbol of national identity and its impact on gender identities in this context.

Modern Japanese people are highly westernized and prefer a similar type of clothing. As a result, wearing traditional garments such as the Kimono are largely restricted to certain festive or special occasions. Chambers (2007, p. 64) says that Japanese national identity can be established through two primary dimensions: Cultural identities and the distinction between traditional and modern practices. Although worn by men, women and children, the Kimono has always been the marked attire worn by Geishas (traditional dancers) and is also worn by women during their coming-of-age ceremony (held around the age of 20).

The goal of characterizing the Kimono as feminine attire can be traced to the cultural renaissance initiated during the Tokugawa era (17th-mid 19th centuries). This persisted among the Japanese elite up until the Meiji period (during the turn of the 20th century) (Mathers, 2005, p. 42). As a result, the role of women in contemporary Japanese society is not dependent on individual choice, but has been built on broad national consensus. Women are looked upon to uphold the family and tradition (as a good mother and wife), unlike men who are supposed to be the decision makers and engage

with the external world.

“ Bodily habits form a certain sense of being in a social setting, creating rules of what is acceptable or not.” (Craik, 1994, p. 56)

Thus, while men prefer western outfits, women are encouraged to adorn the Kimono since its wrapping around the female is a direct representation of national identity. In other words, the wearing the Kimono is widely seen as the differentiating element between Japanese tradition and western cultures.

“ In our culture today, a clothes is a part of identity. It is a fashion statement of who we are. This is because we want to be seen in certain ways. Wearing clothes is a practice of showing our subjectivity.” (McRobbie, 1994, p. 128)

“ Wrapped in this symbol of traditional Japaneseness, the Japanese woman herself has gained a symbolic role, as her kimono-clad image has become one of the eternal images” (Robertson, 2005, p. 127)

Nevertheless, the use of Kimono has waned over the decades primarily due to western influences and the high level of maintenance required to clean and preserve the garment. Efforts are often underway to revive the tradition and increase the use of the Kimono among the younger generation.

According to Fong, M. ad Chuang (2004, p. 96), the required training in etiquette and manners that one needs to demonstrate when wearing a Kimono is a factor that has led to its declining use. Moreover, Rucker (1999, p. 78) found Japanese women to be more willing to invest time in learning to wear the Kimono.

“ I think Japan is always following the U. S., following your system and maybe your way of thinking. I want to think though that we shouldn't abandon our

traditional feelings. We want to get rid of discrimination or unfair things but good things like modesty, that kind of feeling, I want to stay in Japan.”

(Chambers, 2007, p. 146)

This combined with the greater respect for the garment in the society, have led to the Kimono's characterization as the symbolic garment of the Geisha profession. Robertson (2005, p. 105) argues that the Kimono encourages the feeling of collective action and thus helps uphold the decorum during important gatherings. In essence, it can be concluded that the Kimono has emerged as a medium for one to express their beliefs in Japanese culture and related societal conventions.

#### References

Chambers, V., 2007. Kickboxing geishas: how modern Japanese women are changing their nation. University of Virginia.

Craik, J., 1994. The Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion. London: Routledge.

Fong, M. and Chuang, R., 2004. Communicating ethnic and cultural identity. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.

Mathers, G., 2005. Global Culture/Individual Identity: Searching for Home in the Cultural Supermarket. London: Routledge.

McRobbie, A., 1994. Postmodernism and Popular Culture. London: Routledge.

Robertson, J., 2005. A companion to the anthropology of Japan. Boston: John Wiley.

Rucker, et al., 1999. Clothing, Power and the Workplace. Oxford: Berg.