This article examines British responses to changes in Japanese dress during the Victorian period. The disapproval of the Japanese adoption of European clothing is shown to be linked to British anxieties regarding their political relationship and cultural engagement with Japan. The ways in which the kimono served as a touchstone for the British understanding of the country, representing an unchanging and romanticised view of the cultural identity of its Japanese wearer, is also explored. However, the kimono did not only signal ‘Japaneseness’, but was assimilated in British fashion as well. This article further explores how the kimono was related to issues of late nineteenth-century dress reform in Britain as well as to British unease about the cultural changes that they themselves had experienced in the wake of industrialisation.

Introduction

In 1871 Emperor Meiji of Japan issued a proclamation prescribing European dress for himself, his Court and his officials. Seemingly at odds with her husband’s new look and that of a rapidly modernising Japan, the Empress followed suit in 1886. A flurry of activity in the British press following the latter shows a critical response, as evidenced in the comic ‘Not so Japan-easy at first’ (Fig. 1). This cartoon depicts three resplendent ladies identified as Japanese by the caricature of their faces and distinct coiffures ornamented with fans and decorative pins. They carry fans depicting asymmetrically placed Japanese motifs, including birds, floral sprays and meandering clouds. Their gowns, though European in form, likewise are elaborated in natural motifs associated with Japanese design. However, the overall effect of the women’s dress is ruined by the fact that they are wearing their bustles on the outside of their gowns.

Other responses to the Japanese decrees extended their critique beyond external appearance to issues of comfort, health, expense and even morality. One article emphasised the discomfort awaiting the Japanese woman in donning a pair of European shoes or corset. It further stressed the naivety of the Empress and her Court in imagining that Europeans of all nationalities dressed alike. A poem appearing in Moonshine pointed to the Japanese engagement with fashion, presented as an imported phenomenon from Europe, particularly France, that resulted in unnatural, irrational, humiliating, not to mention expensive consequences that threatened to upset the morality and very integrity of Japanese society:
‘Not So Japan-Easy’

Fashion invades remote Japan
With all its whims irrational,
The Empress having placed a ban
On costumes quaintly national;
So ladies of the court, they say,
And damsels most fastidious,
Wear Paris fashion of the day
And dress improvers’ hideous.

The flowing robe that loosely clad Jap[anese] maidens with propriety
Now yields to some Parisian fad
Of Fashion’s strange variety;
And buxom fair ones pinch the waist,
Making it disproportionate,
While Japanese dressmakers haste to run up bills extortionate.

[…] We trust if from Japan has dropped
Past individuality.
That with French garb they won’t adopt
Parisian morality.5

This article examines the ways in which the British perception of Japan and its people and culture in the last four decades of the nineteenth century is revealed through their
reception of the adoption of European clothing in Japan, as well as through their views on the kimono. The difference between the kimono and European clothing in terms of construction, form and decoration allowed for a concrete differentiation to be drawn between the two forms of dress and between their wearers. For the British observer, the kimono signified the national, racial and cultural identity of its Japanese wearer. In contrast, the appearance of Japanese people in European clothing evoked an anxious response, as it upset this visual marker of hierarchy, or, as Homi Bhabha describes in his discussion of hybridity, represented ‘that ambivalent “turn” of the discriminated subject into the terrifying, exorbitant object of paranoid classification — a disturbing questioning of the images and presences of authority’. How did such anxieties compare to the reasons underpinning the Japanese sartorial response to renewed contact with the West? The Victorian response to Japanese dress will be further discussed in relation to issues of British dress reform, as well as to sentiments regarding cultural and artistic change in Britain in the wake of industrialisation, demonstrating how fashion can support cultural stereotypes as well as transcend them.

This analysis draws upon the observations of Western residents and British travellers to Japan, as well as those in Britain who glimpsed Japanese visitors to Europe or read about them in travel literature, memoirs or popular newspapers and journals. The views on Japanese dress of reputed ‘experts’ on Japan and laymen alike demonstrate a high degree of consistency and repetition across the forty-some years under consideration, and interest aroused by this topic remained intense throughout the period. Visual and object analysis further inform this article: paintings, prints, photographs and items of dress provide real, imagined and longed-for snapshots of cross-cultural interaction in dress.

Early Contact: The Invention of the Kimono

The kimono is often viewed as a traditional dress form. However, this ‘tradition’ is really a modern construction of the late nineteenth century. The kosode, the undergarment of the élite that came to be the primary garment worn by both men and women in Japan, evolved into the kimono. Liza Dalby explains that ‘In spite of a millennium of intense dialogue within Japan about the finest nuances of clothing, only the shock of contrast occasioned by seeing the dress of the outlandish West forced the Japanese to identify what they themselves really wore’. The term ‘kimono’, meaning ‘thing worn’, came into usage. This was a useful term for foreigners unable or unwilling to distinguish between the subtle differences in Japanese dress. The strong association between tradition and kimono is particularly significant here in understanding British perceptions of Japan in the late nineteenth century, ideas that to some extent continue to inform a cultural understanding of Japan.

At the time of writing, the kimono is generally viewed as embodying the traditional cultural values of Japan and Japanese feminine beauty. Regret is regularly expressed that this ‘traditional’ garment has been set aside, relegated to formal occasions such as weddings, funerals or coming of age ceremonies, despite a resurgence in their everyday use as well as theatrical incorporation into youth fashions. The internet has enabled kimono enthusiasts all over the world to engage with this dress form, providing instruction through blogs and social networking sites such as YouTube on how to wear
‘Not So Japan-Easy’

kimono and the opportunity to purchase them through sites such as ebay, Rakuten Global Market and Kimono Flea Market Ichiroyan. This article will demonstrate that this kind of cross-cultural interaction with the kimono was already occurring in the nineteenth century.

Early British impressions of Japanese dress were favourable. Such impressions were recorded by those accompanying Lord Elgin’s mission to Japan in 1858 to secure a treaty between the two nations. For over two hundred years, Tokugawa Japan had controlled its interaction with the outside world by largely restricting it. However, in 1858, under the thinly veiled threat of force and with an awareness of the extent and consequences of colonialism in East Asia, the Japanese government signed the Treaty of Peace, Amity and Commerce with America, followed by similar treaties with European nations, which opened its ports to trade. Upon his arrival in Nagasaki, Sherard Osborn, Captain of the Furious during Elgin’s mission, described the ‘sombre colours’ of the dress of the Japanese women, officials and gentry, noting ‘the absence of that vulgar colouring and tinsel-work so common in China’. This observation is one of several made by Osborn in which he contrasted the newly encountered Japanese to the Chinese. Besides providing a known frame of reference for describing the unfamiliar nation, comparisons that favoured the Japanese hinted at the soured relations between Britain and China and at the hope for the development of better relations between Britain and Japan.

Osborn further noted the populace’s interest in the ‘brilliant buttons’, ‘shining boots’ and other features of British naval uniforms. The materials and forms of these uniforms would have been unusual in Japan as a kimono relies on an obi (large sash) rather than buttons or hooks to secure it, and one can step out of geta (sandals), unlike lace-up boots, so British naval regalia may indeed have fascinated Japanese observers. When the flow of Western wares was established at the treaty ports, previously unfamiliar items such as pocket watches, umbrellas, boots or bowler hats were quickly adopted ‘as symbols of style and modernity or simply because they were convenient or useful’.

With the opening of the country’s ports, the Japanese began to travel abroad on diplomatic and fact-finding missions. By coincidence, the Bakufu Mission’s visit to London coincided with the opening of the International Exhibition in 1862. Among the displays was the first exhibition of Japanese artefacts widely accessible to the British public. Critics and the exhibition-going public alike marvelled at the diversity and quality of Japanese decorative art now available for consumption, and the Japan Court received much attention and praise. Although textiles formed only a small part of this exhibition, and of these only a few clothing specimens were included as ethnographic examples, the Bakufu Mission’s attendance at the opening ceremonies for the Exhibition turned all eyes to the Japanese officers’ dress. While its plain but rich material and sombre colour were noted, reflecting Osborn’s observations a few years previously, it was also described as ‘soutane-like’ and of particular interest to female observers.

When the Bakufu mission visited Newcastle upon Tyne to observe the city’s industries later that same month, their dress was again scrutinised. One local paper reported that: ‘All were dressed in the most outlandish garments, resembling somewhat those of Chinese women [. . .] [T]he chief ambassador’s dress [. . .] bore a very strong resemblance to that of a woman’. A binary opposition between Britain and Japan, ascribing to one masculine characteristics and to the other feminine, was used to help cement an unequal power relationship between the two. As a site of desire and potential exploitation — a
distant land recently opened to the West after centuries of isolation, a land capable of producing exquisite art manufacture — the feminine attribution is unsurprising.

**Bunmei Kaika (Civilisation and Enlightenment) and Japanese Dress**

Japanese dress was used to identify the Japanese and lock them into a cultural and political hierarchy that favoured the British viewer. Observations like those made in London and Newcastle, whereby the ambassadors, their dress and Japan as a whole were characterised as feminine and identified with a politically weak China, did not go unnoticed in Japan. The social reformer Fukuzawa Yukichi, for example, perceived that during the Japan delegation’s travels they were seen as something of an exotic spectacle in their Japanese dress.22 Fukuzawa argued that wearing European-style clothing was an essential component in presenting Japan on a par with the ‘civilised’ nations of the West, dissolving Japan’s identification with a weak, effeminate East in need of Western guidance, thus assisting in the reversal of the unequal treaties. The Japanese adoption of European-style clothing can be seen in part as an act of contestation, as it upset the binary opposition of viewer (Britain) and ‘other’ (Japan). To help prepare the Japanese for their new cross-cultural dealings, in 1867 Fukuzawa published a guidebook on Western clothing, manners, food and homes entitled *Seiyō ishokujū*.23 Contrary to the assertions of the British popular press that European clothing was too complicated to be understood and worn correctly by the Japanese, *Seiyō ishokujū* demonstrates an early effort to master it. Not only did it describe and contrast American and European fashions and point out class distinctions in dress, but it also illustrated *yōfuku* (foreign clothing) and instructed on the correct sequence in dressing. To familiarise its readers with separate items of dress, the guidebook offered the equivalent of the English language names in Katakana24 in addition to descriptions in Kanji (Chinese characters). For example, illustrations of a top hat and bowler hat were accompanied by the text ‘ハット’ (hatto) and a cap by the text ‘ケーブル’ (keppu) (Fig. 2).

*Seiyō ishokujū* also illustrated Western accessories and detailed their use. This included the pocket-watch, which came to be a very popular accessory among the Japanese in the treaty ports. The book explained the Western division of days into hours, minutes and seconds, related this to the clock face and justified its detailed description by stating that: ‘In the West, they know the time not by the boom of a temple bell but by a watch they always bring with them. Recently, it is getting popular that people here wear the foreign-made watch. Sometimes they do not know how to read it’.

The pocket watch was but one of the items with which the Japanese urbanite accessorised following the opening of the treaty ports. Kanagaki Robun’s 1871 comic novel *Aguranabe* included the caricature of a man enamoured with Western things, who explained his views on Japan’s march towards progress over a meal of beef, viewed as another foreign influence.26 To further mark himself as a man of progress, ‘[f]rom time to time he removes from his sleeve with a painfully contrived gesture a cheap watch, and consults the time’.27 The author included other details demonstrating the caricatured man’s identification with the West: his long, uncut hair scented with Eau de Cologne,28 calico undergarment visible beneath his kimono and ownership of a gingham-covered, Western-style umbrella.29 An illustration of the beef-eating Westophile shows him conspicuously cross-legged (as opposed to kneeling), his discarded top hat and Western-style
‘Not So Japan-Easy’

While popular Japanese novels poked fun at such conspicuous displays, other visual mediums, including photographs and woodblock prints such as those depicting the treaty port at Yokohama (Yokohama-e) or modern developments in Tokyo (kaika nishiki-e, or Enlightenment prints), depicted such changes more positively. Yokohama-e and early postcards showing views of well-known sites in Yokohama offer glimpses of Japanese experimentation with Western items of clothing and accessories. One postcard, dating from around 1900, depicts a busy crowd including Japanese dressed in hats, boots and carrying Western-style umbrellas, flanked by modern steamships at a popular pier in the port town (Fig. 3). The newfound fascination with Western imports and fashionable experimentation is well demonstrated in a passage from the Japanese newspaper Shimbun zasshi in 1872. It mused:

The yōfuku of the world is strange and wonderful. A man can wear a Prussian cap on his head, French shoes on his feet, the jacket of an English sailor, and American military dress trousers. A woman will wrap her juban [underkimono] closely about her, wearing a man’s long wool overcoat on top. The ordinary Japanese citizen dresses himself in clothing stripped from the world.
The 1874 Enlightenment print, ‘Scenic View of Tokyo Enlightenment: Picture of Stone Construction at Kyōbashi and Prosperity of Brick and Stone Shops on both Sides of Ginza Street’, by Utagawa Hiroshige III, celebrated the modernisation of the Ginza district in Tokyo (Fig. 4). A devastating fire in 1872 allowed this area to be rebuilt under the direction of British architect Thomas J. Waters as a brick district. This strategic
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transformation presented a modernised view of the city to Japanese citizens and foreigners alike, as it connected the new train station at Shibashi with the European settlement in Tsukiji. Several other sights marked rapid technological and social developments in addition to the buildings. The middle ground included a bustling, spacious, tree-lined street, populated by a cosmopolitan mix of pedestrians, rickshaws and carriages alike, and even an omnibus. The gas lamps lining the Kyōbashi Bridge in the foreground served as further evidence of modernisation. Several characters populating this image sported the latest fashion, mixing haori (jacket worn over kimono) and hakama (lower garment resembling a divided skirt) with bowler hats and Western shoes. Most prominent was the man in the right foreground in heeled shoes, dangling a hat in his hand. He also wore a red erimaki, or scarf, looped dapperly around his neck. These sartorial elements were key visual motifs expressing the Meiji ideal of bunmei kaika, civilisation and enlightenment.

The exemplars par excellence for adopting European clothing were, of course, the reinstated Emperor Meiji and his wife. Sally Hastings has argued that wafuku (Japanese clothing) was at odds with the modernisation taking place in Japan, and that as regular attendees at grand openings, such as those for railways and hospitals, as well as Western-style soirées, the Emperor and Empress adopted European dress as a symbol of the modern state. Dress was further linked to national identity. When the Empress addressed her female subjects on the topic of Western dress, she argued that the Western combination of top or jacket and skirt was similar to the ancient system of Japanese dress, while the kimono was a sino-form, deformed and inappropriate for the demands of modern life. This declaration sought to free Japan from association with an effeminate East and to realign the country with Western powers. By ordering the Court to adopt European clothing for official and ceremonial occasions, the pre-Meiji ruling élites, the courtiers of Kyoto and the Tokugawa samurai, who in the past had operated and dressed differently from one another, were now unified under a new dress code that allowed for ‘a revised and unified aristocracy for the new Japan’. This strategy was also extended to the population at large, as Western-style uniforms were adopted for newly formed professions such as the police, army and postal workers. Here clothing was vital in removing pre-Meiji political or class distinctions, as well as clearly signalling to the West that Japan’s social and military services were on a par with ‘civilised’ nations. The vision of a united ruling élite is portrayed in Adachi Ginkō’s print of 1889, ‘Picture of the Issuance of the Constitution in the State Chamber of the New Imperial Palace’. On 11 February 1889 a constitution was officially proclaimed: representative government was an important step in Japan’s ongoing mission to reverse the unequal treaties, as it was viewed as a key component of ‘civilised’ nations. The Western-style uniforms and gowns worn by the Emperor, Empress, their Court and other Japanese officials, as well as State Chamber fittings such as gilded armchairs and red-carpeted dais, outwardly signalled the embracement of Western ideals.

The Japanese assimilation of Western dress was a powerful sartorial statement of change in the country. However, it is important to note that the adoption of Western clothing was limited in the Meiji period to urban areas, particularly port towns, and was mostly worn by uniformed professionals or the élite, particularly men. Adopting European dress marked Japanese men as equal participants on the global stage and allied them with the associated characteristics of rationality and seriousness. Even then,
Japanese men often abandoned European clothing in the privacy of their own homes in favour of Japanese clothing for comfort at the end of the day. As the nineteenth century drew to a close, the kimono continued to mark Japanese-ness but, as it was predominately worn by women, it also became increasingly associated with feminine beauty.

The British Reception of Japanese Dress

How did the ever-increasing flow of British visitors to Japan view these changes? In 1876 and 1877 the internationally renowned industrial designer Christopher Dresser travelled to Japan to fulfil a variety of commissions, including acting as official adviser to Japanese art manufacturers. He recorded his journey and visits to manufacturers throughout Japan in *Japan: Its Architecture, Art and Art Manufactures*, published in 1882. Dresser’s design theory and practice demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of Japanese design principles, but his observations of dress were consistent with those expressed in a vast body of travel literature. While he praised the kimono, he criticised the adoption of European clothing in Japan as ‘absurd’, ‘ridiculous’ and ‘pitiable’ due to its ill-fitting nature.

Dresser described the evening suit worn by one Japanese man as characterised by sleeves and trousers six inches too long and by a hat kept on the man’s head only by placing a wadded handkerchief between the forehead and the rim. To further demonstrate the awkwardness of this ensemble, Dresser described the man’s attempts to conspicuously display his mittens by holding his elbows ‘somewhat akimbo’.

While many British authors would use the issue of fit to argue that Western clothing did not suit the Japanese body, often using unflattering or racist terms, Dresser attempted to understand the situation in the context of the recent political and social upheaval in Japan. He speculated that the ill-fitting garments could result from the adverse economic circumstances in which some *daimyo* (feudal landowners) found themselves following the governmental shift from Tokugawa to Meiji. Other factors should also be considered. Tailoring was an expensive and burgeoning skill in the Meiji period, as it was unnecessary in the construction of Japanese dress. The kimono is an unfitted garment that drapes from the shoulders downward and is designed to wrap around the body, being secured by an *obi*, which is used to adjust its length. At the same time, wool, the quintessential fabric of suits, had not been widely used in Japan and was thus very expensive.

Although the availability of tailored suits and accessories improved as the late nineteenth century wore on, finding fault with the meticulously dressed *haikara* (a reference to the high-neck collar attached to men’s dress shirts and used to describe those who indulged superficially with Western things), continued to be a particular passion among travellers to Japan. The botanical painter Marianne North, a traveller contemporary to Dresser, noted a Japanese hotel manager’s ‘monstrous’ plaid European costume ‘with a prodigious watch chain and breast pin’. She further opined: ‘The young men, with their attempts at European clothing and manners, were comical with their greatcoats and wideawakes over petticoats and pattens’. Dresser’s business partner Charles Holme, with whom he established an Eastern import company in 1878, observed during a train ride to Nagoya in 1888:
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Opposite us were two young bloods got up in the latest European style: new cutaway coats, new elastic side boots, new Gladstone bags containing new Japanese books bound in the latest European style, new cigarette holders and a brand new Mackintosh pouch for tobacco. Everything was quite faultless and they evidently fancied themselves immensely. Unfortunately for the effect of one of them, putting one leg over the other he disclosed a little piece of bare leg without any appearance of stocking over the boot top. This little omission seemed to take away from his glory.49

The indiscretion described by Holme was rather mild in comparison to numerous tales of the often immodest results arising from Japanese experimentation with Western dress. Such tales were clearly aimed at provoking a snigger and are revealing of racial stereotypes. In 1889 the *Lady's Pictorial* described a Japanese ball:

Many of the ladies were in European attire, but oh! That it had not been so! They lost all grace and distinction, and became merely badly-figured little women, dressed in atrocious taste, and with their toes turned in like so many ducks. One lady, who evidently felt perfectly satisfied with her costume, wore a very crumpled and short dress of salmon pink, trimmed with scarlet; a scarlet ostrich feather, guiltless of all curl, was laid flat on her head; and as to the fit of her bodice, and the gap between it and the skirt, showing all sorts of wonderful under-garments, I cannot bear myself to think of it.50

Western accounts and satirical cartoons insisted that Western clothing did not suit the Japanese body and even deformed it, as demonstrated in the most unflattering terms in illustrations by the French artist, Georges Bigot, who offered a damning critique of Westophiles for an expatriate and tourist audience in his publication *Toba-e*.51 In one such cartoon the shortness and awkwardness of the Japanese in Western clothing was emphasised by the statuesque Europeans towering above them (Fig. 5). The latter were so tall that they rose above the picture plane. The subjects of these comics were often drawn from a site where the Japanese adoption of Western dress came under heavy scrutiny, the Rokumeikan.52 The opening of this social hall in Tokyo in 1883 is often signalled as the zenith of the craze for Westernisation. The desire to overturn the unequal treaties led Meiji leaders to recreate the trappings of European high society in a place where Japanese and foreign officials could socialise as equals. Used as a residence for foreigners until the 1890s, this building also hosted a variety of functions, such as balls and banquets. The music played and the food served were in the Western style and Japanese guests attended in European dress. However, as Bigot’s cartoon suggests, the belief that the Rokumeikan and adoption of *yōfu ku* demonstrated a cosmopolitan, enlightened attitude was at odds with most foreigners’ assessment of the situation.

Despite the limited scale of sartorial changes in late nineteenth-century Japan, one is hard pressed to find a British visitor who did not lament the adoption of Western clothing as signifying the slippery slope leading to the eradication of ‘Old Japan’. Westerners drew a distinction between ‘new’ and ‘old’ Japan, the former engaged in rapid modernisation, the latter an idealised image of pre-Meiji Japan. As the Scottish painter E. A. Hornel, who visited Japan in 1893–1894 and again in 1920–1921, stated: ‘Commodore Perry’s visit […] followed by the revolution of 1868, swept away forever the old Japan with its poetry and romance, investing the country with a popular government and the
habits and practices of Birmingham’. The parallel with Birmingham is important, as it signified a modern, heavily industrialised city and also hinted at the widespread use of industrial methods to produce decorative art. Foreign visitors to Japan made allowances for some modernisation: railways, gas and later electric lighting, telegraph offices and hotels fitted out with Western furniture allowed them to enjoy the unfamiliar from within their comfort zone. However, tourists longed to observe a picturesque landscape peopled by individuals in traditional costume engaged in traditional activities. The humorous poem ‘Ode to Take-Hito’, published in *Funny Folks* in 1881, linked both dress and decorative art to picturesqueness, appealing to the Japanese Prince Arisugawa Takehito:

... do not let Parisian tailors dress thee  
In formal stove-pipe hat and 'swallow-tails'.  
Let Progress keep its Oriental dress;  
Build railways and electric-light thy cities;  
But substituting Western ugliness  
For Eastern beauty is a thousand pities.  
Stick to thy picturesqueness, and thy paper  
For hats, coats, 'kerchiefs, sunshades, fans and screens.  
Were Nagasaki built on Glasgow's plan,  
Or Jeddo made like London, who would need it?  
So, gracious Prince, re-polish Old Japan,  
But don't let Western varnish supersede it.

The persistent critique waged against the Japanese adoption of European clothing should not be read solely as an effort to locate recently reopened Japan in relation to Victorian hierarchies of race or nation. The kimono also served as a potent visual sign...
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of Japanese tradition. Eric Hobsbawn has argued that as tradition relates to a set of interacting practices, to disrupt one, disrupts all. Thus, a break with the kimono was perceived by many Westerners as a break with the past, and this was seen as a factor that would lead to the deterioration in the quality of all things Japanese admired in the West. These concerns were evident in a petition of 1888 addressed to Japanese women and issued by American women, led by First Lady Mrs Cleveland and former First Lady Mrs Garfield, and widely reported in British newspapers. It warned that: ‘Foreign carpets, chairs, and tables must be added to foreign dress and shoes, and Japanese household interiors now held up to the world as models of grace, simplicity, and harmony, will have to be entirely remodelled’.

The emphasis on the refined and beautiful nature of the kimono can also be linked to the concerns of British dress reformers. Between the 1870s and 1890s aesthetes, dress and hygiene reformers decried the unnatural forms of fashionable dress, achieved through the use of stays and corsets, and the startling hues produced by aniline dyes, as both hideous and dangerous. They looked to historic costume, particularly Greek and medieval examples, for solutions. In her book of 1885 advising on healthy dress, Ada Ballin identified ideal dress as providing warmth, freedom of movement and no ‘injurious pressure on the abdominal and pelvic organs’. Such dress forms were also regarded as being removed from spurious fashions. As few extant examples of Greek or medieval costume survived, Eastern dress, such as the kimono with its flowing form that followed the natural curves of the body and its pendulous sleeves, served as inspiration in lieu of these historic examples. The kimono was widely viewed as a comfortable, easy to remove garment and was adapted into dressing or tea gowns, as demonstrated in Figure 6, which shows a tea gown of 1895 that incorporates several Japanese-inspired features such as long sleeves resembling those of a furisode (long-sleeved kimono) and the embroidered motif of chrysanthemums, the national flower of Japan. This tea gown is typical of what was available in shops catering to the enthusiasm for Japanese wares, such as Liberty’s of London.

Women’s journals applied the term ‘Japan’ to dressing gowns with long sleeves or constructed in Japanese silks, and after 1900 used the term ‘kimono’ to describe these garments. The popularity of such gowns is attested to by their inclusion in catalogues such as that for the London department store Harrods, which in 1909 depicted kimonos, wraps, dressing gowns, jackets and tea gowns, all characterised by pendulous sleeves and flowing forms. The full-length kimono and wrap depicted in Figure 7, one in silk, the other in cotton, demonstrate the variety of such garments at costs to suit nearly every pocket. They are further identified as being in the Japanese style by product name: the ‘Pitti Sing’ and ‘Mikado’, names that reference Gilbert and Sullivan’s popular opera of 1885, The Mikado.

The view of the kimono as a loose-fitting garment demonstrated a lack of familiarity with how the garment was worn in actuality. The Rational Dress Society, on the other hand, took a slightly different view of Japanese women’s dress than the norm in the late nineteenth century, condemning the kimono as ‘unsuited for active life’ and ‘imped[ing] the free movement of its wearers’. However, they found it the lesser of two evils when weighed up against Japanese women’s adoption of French fashions. An exchange between the Society and the editor of the Tokyo Daily News, Simurom Shimada, considered what the most healthy and rational dress should be for women in Japan.
Shimada sent *hakama* to the Society for their scrutiny, which the Society found sensible, describing it as akin to a divided skirt.\(^6\) *Hakama*, traditionally menswear in Japan, were being adopted during the Meiji period by female students and workers, both as a sensible uniform and as attire more appropriate to the demands of workplaces such as factories than the kimono.\(^6\) This seemed a suitable solution to one writer for the *Gazette*, who wished the Japanese to appear in their own clothing while embracing dress reform.\(^5\)

The majority of Victorians were less interested in how dress reform could positively impact upon Japanese dress and more in preserving what they considered Japanese traditional clothing. Their widespread consumption of tourist photographs was one fruit of this desire. Tourist photographs depicting the Japanese differed notably from *Yokohama-e* and Enlightenment prints. The motif of the kimono was pivotal in these images, portraying a Japan impervious to change. Although referred to as ‘types’, suggesting ethnographic classification, photographs of the Japanese were also frequently referred to as ‘costume’ photographs. Luke Gartlan and Elizabeth Edwards have argued that the significance of these images is more about tourism than the presentation of
specimens of racial types. The popularity of such souvenir photographs led to a brisk trade in Yokohama. This is apparent when paging through advertisements in various editions of Murray’s *Handbook for Travellers in Japan*, published between 1881 and 1913, in which photographic studios advertised. Photographs were available for purchase preassembled in (allegedly) gorgeous lacquer- or cloth-covered albums. In 1899 K. Ogawa boasted of its celebrated albums of views, customs and flowers of Japan, while K. Tamamura tempted shoppers with claims that his establishment was the best place to get the finest photographs of Japanese in their native costume or views of Japan. In addition to the usual photographs of Japanese views and costumes, lantern slides and albums, in 1901 K. Kimbei offered photographic silk fans, while S. Ogawa offered photographic silk fans and screens. Examples of such items are preserved in the collection at Beamish, the Living Museum of the North (Fig. 8). One handscreen depicted two young Japanese women admiring an embroidered screen. The image drew a connection between the kimono-clad beauties and the screen that they were admiring, further cementing the traditional continuity between the kimono and the Japanese decorative wares so admired in the West.
Tourist photographs rarely depicted the Japanese in European dress, and, when this did occur, the intention seems to have been to critique rather than to flatter.\textsuperscript{71} In the photograph below (Fig. 9), c. 1870s, entitled ‘The civilized Japs’ \textit{sic}, there is something uncomfortable rather than graceful in the appearance of the unidentified man and woman depicted; the man, for example, gnaws on an almost comically large cigar and his suit billows around him. Eleanor Hight has compared a pair of photographs from the 1870s labelled ‘before’ and ‘after’, which oppose a Japanese man dressed as a samurai to a Japanese man dressed in European clothing. While the ‘before’ image radiates poise and grace, the ‘after’ image contrasts strongly: the model in top hat and tails is swallowed up by a jacket too large for him and gapes awkwardly at the viewer.\textsuperscript{72} Such images echoed the written sentiments formerly expressed by those travelling to, or living in, Japan as visual confirmation of the decline of ‘Old Japan’. Notably, it was clothing, more so than any other material markers of modernisation, that was used to convey this message.

Photographs of people in Japanese costume purposely portrayed a land before its ports were reopened and cross-cultural and technological exchange resumed. This desire
to depict ‘Old Japan’ is also apparent in the work of British painters who travelled to the country. Picturesque landscapes, often peopled by Japanese in kimono, or genre scenes dominate this work. For example, the paintings of E. A. Hornel portray a Japan very different from the one that he likened to Birmingham. His images are filled with Japanese women and children dressed in kimono and engaged in traditional activities. The subject of Hornel’s paintings and his particular emphasis on the colour and pattern of kimono perpetuate an image of a decorative, beautiful, unchanging, cheerful and sensual land. Brightly coloured and patterned textiles dominate the composition of his 1896 painting ‘Japanese Silk Shop’ (Fig. 10). In addition to swags and bolts of colourful fabric, the image includes five Japanese women in vibrant, patterned kimono. Like the hand screen depicted in Figure 8, this image offers a decorative and sensual experience.
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in which Japanese wares and women in kimono are both offered up for aesthetic enjoyment. The press response to Hornel’s Japan paintings exhibition in 1895 was resoundingly positive, complimenting the artist’s use of vibrant colour.73 Such depictions differed strongly from Osborn’s 1859 account or the 1862 Exhibition literature’s description of Japanese dress as sombre in tone, demonstrating that an association between the decorative, bright colours and kimono had readily infiltrated the Victorian consciousness. The reliability of this connection was questioned by visitors to Japan. Dresser stated that the Japanese dress and textiles that he saw during his 1876–1877 visit were generally not as strong in colour as the objects in his own collection.74 Similarly, the Scottish painter George Henry, who travelled to Japan between 1893 and 1894 in the company of Hornel, stated to the press that the predominant colour of dress was ‘dark blue, unrelieved by any variety’, unlike the prints with which people in Britain were so familiar.75

Hornel’s paintings presented a colourful, idealised view of a timeless Japan, and the kimono was central to these images. Hornel’s choice of subject matter and his continuing popularity with the picture-buying public from the 1890s until his death in the 1930s may have related to feelings of unease about the effects of industrialisation on Britain. Before travelling to Japan Hornel’s paintings had been dominated by the depiction of local girls frolicking in a rural landscape; such timeless rustic idylls populated by the ‘Romantic child’ were particularly popular with consumers, portraying a world apart.

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from the heavily populated, industrialised cities of Britain. Anne Higonnet and Cassi Albinson have written about the construction of the ‘Romantic child’ and the appeal of an image of childish innocence that appears both natural and timeless, ‘[y]et, far from being inherent in any state of nature or being inherent in children’s bodies, the innocence of childhood was a fashionable invention, formulated in art, refined in theory, and costumed for the part’. The authors offer the example of the Empire-style children’s clothing created by illustrator and designer Kate Greenaway from the late 1870s, which inspired Liberty’s fashions for children immediately thereafter. Her illustrations of children in dress inspired by historical examples removed them from the contemporary world, the industrial world, especially when placed within a pastoral landscape. Similarly, Hornel’s paintings of girls in the countryside or of Japanese women in kimono could suggest timelessness. His Japan pictures did not make reference to the rapid modernisation of the country that he himself witnessed first-hand in the 1890s and again in the 1920s, at which time he confided in letters exchanged with his book dealer, Thomas Fraser, that upon revisiting Tokyo he had not ‘recognise[d] a single street’ and had been chagrined by the appearance of skyscrapers. In light of such disappointments Hornel seems to have turned for artistic inspiration to the large number of costume photographs that he had acquired during his trips to Japan. Spatters of paint on a number of these images demonstrate that these photographs were used as models for painting and not just as idle souvenirs collecting dust.

Conclusion

The British reaction to the appearance of Japanese people in European clothing rather than kimono was overwhelmingly fraught with disapproval. Although the adoption of Western dress in Meiji Japan was intended to unite people from different classes during a period of rapid social transition and mark the country as an equal player on the world stage, this view was not shared by foreigner observers. For decades Western writers urged the Japanese to preserve their traditional dress, homogenised under the umbrella term ‘kimono’, which they viewed as in happy agreement with the national character of the Japanese. In Western eyes, this character was decorative and quaint — even child-like, or sensual and feminine, and in need of Western guidance, clearly indicating a particular power relationship between the countries. The abandonment of the kimono in favour of European clothing not only disrupted Victorian ideas regarding the national and cultural identity of Japan, but was also implicated in the perceived deterioration in the quality of Japanese decorative art, as it was argued that Japanese furniture and other objects, so admired in the West, would be the next to change irreparably.

At the same time, the kimono was adapted into British fashion and visual culture and was assimilated into Western clothing. Aesthetes and dress reformers regarded its form as exemplary of healthy and beautiful dress, supposedly removed from spurious fashion. Photographs or paintings depicting kimono also became popular among mainstream consumers. This resonated not only with Victorian yearnings to preserve ‘Old’ Japan, but also with the desire to recapture a time before Britain’s own industrialisation. The kimono was used to maintain and strengthen distinct ideas about ‘Japaneseness’, while transcending geographical borders in fashion inspiration and influence.
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References


4 Ibid.


8 Dalby, Kimono, p. 65.


10 For a discussion of the kimono’s gendered and nationalised identity, see O. Goldstein-Gidoni, ‘Kimono and the construction of gendered and cultural identities’, Ethnology, xxxviii, no. 4 (1999), pp. 351–70.


17 The Tokugawa Shogunate sent out seven missions in addition to students between 1860 and 1867, including to the European Treaty Powers in 1862. See M. D. Ericson, ‘The Bakufu looks abroad: the 1865 mission to France’, Monumenta Nipponica, xxxiv, no. 4 (1979), p. 383. The purpose of these missions was to overturn the unequal treaties, postpone the opening of treaty ports in Japan to foreigners and engage in fact-finding about the West.


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24 Katakana is a form of syllabic writing used for assimilating foreign words into Japanese.
26 The conventional view is that beef-eating became fashionable in urban centres during the Meiji Restoration, following exposure to Western customs. However, the notion of meat-free eating in pre-Meiji Japan was only popularised and theorised in the early twentieth century. See H. M. Krämer, “‘Not befitting our divine country’: eating meat in Japanese discourses of self and other from the seventeenth century to the present’, Food and Foodways, xvi (2008), pp. 33–62.
29 ‘The Beefeater ’, pp. 31–32.
31 Shimbun zasshi (News magazine), 1872, quoted in Dalby, Kimono, p. 75.
33 Dalby defines the erimaki as a ‘collar-winder’ or ‘a scarf or shawl worn over kimono’. Dalby, Kimono, p. 80.
35 Dalby, Kimono, pp. 90–91.
38 See Meech-Pekarik’s discussion in The World of the Meiji Print, pp. 170–73, which includes a photographic image of the state chamber.
40 Slade, Japanese Fashion, p. 66.
43 Dresser, Traditional Arts and Crafts of Japan, p. 30.
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6 Dalby, Kimono, pp. 77–78; Slade, Japanese Fashion, pp. 53–55, 137.
8 Ibid., p. 93.
11 Georges Bigot lived in Japan between 1882 and 1889. His satirical newspaper, Toba-e, published from 1887, was critical both of the Japanese government and of Westernisation. The title was derived from comic woodblock prints by the same name that had been popular in Osaka in the eighteenth century. See Meech-Pekarik, The World of the Meiji Print, p. 187.
14 ‘Ode to Take-Hito’, Funny Folks, 12 March 1881, p. 74.
16 See, for example, ‘Western and eastern dress’, The Queen, 1 September 1888, p. 249; M. Reed, ‘A chat about Japanese dress’, The Woman’s World, 1889, p. 558.
19 It has been suggested that this gown is from the London store Liberty & Co., although no label remains, Kyoto Costume Institute Digital Archives. Available from: http://www.kci.or.jp/archives/digital_archives/collection_japonism_e.html [Accessed: 20 December 2012].
22 Ibid., April 1889, p. 1.
23 Ibid., July 1889, p. 4.
25 ‘Rational dress’, p. 4.
28 Ibid., p. 50.
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71 During a research trip to Yokohama Archives of History in 2010, I surveyed fifty-five tourist albums from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Beside photographs presenting Emperor Meiji in dress uniform (always opposed to images of the Empress in ceremonial Japanese dress) and photographs depicting earthquake damage, which occasionally include Japanese men in Western clothing, I found only two images depicting Japanese in foreign clothing. As Eleanor Hight has pointed out, while tourists were interested in photographs representing ‘Old Japan’, earlier portraits of the Japanese for the Japanese demonstrate a fascination with experimenting with Western clothing and accessories. Hight, Capturing Japan, p. 108. For examples, see Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Portraits (Tokyo: Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, 2010), pp. 16–66.

72 Hight, Capturing Japan, pp. 142–44, including figs 5.16a and b.


76 E. A. Hornel to T. Fraser, 21 July 1921, Hornel Library/The National Trust for Scotland, Broughton House.


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