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Fashion and Cultural Influences: A Conversation Between Japan and the West

Key Words: Japan, Meiji Period, Orientalism, 19th Century, capitalism, Westernization, fashion/art.

Outline:

- I. Introduction – opening questions about Japan in the 19th century and the West’s turn toward orientalism in the 19th and 20th century.
* Thesis: Japan influenced the Western market only to the extent that the West could fit it into their pre-conceived notions of the East and Japan, being equally fascinated with the West, Japan was consequently more impacted by this relationship in their cultural shift of the time to a more Western culture and fashion.
- II. Brief history of Japan’s position at the time and the internal conflict in Japan about becoming Westernized. The Shogun vs. Meiji and the conservative vs. progressive Japan. The progressive Meiji regain power and restore the Meiji emperor. (Picture from “Japan Photographs” of the young emperor in Western attire).
- III. The West’s ideas of Japan and orientalism. How the West took what they wanted from Japan for their art. The West’s fascination with the East for centuries, specifically regarding fashion, the oriental motifs and elements.
- IV. Japan’s role in the forming of this stereotype based on it’s exports and role in the market. The West’s perception of the East is perpetuated by

the exports Japan send to the West like buttons and fans. (Kyoto Costume Institute photos).

- V. Conclusion – How have these stereotypes been perpetuated even today?
How does art and fashion address these issues today?

Key Quotes:

“To better understand her experiences and to more clearly explain them to her reader, Mrs. Hodgson has sought Western parallels to her Japanese experiences, and the temple has been translated into a ‘church’, and the festival for the dead to ‘All Saints Day’. As with all translations, the original is transformed into something new, with the Japanese experience consequently becoming altered to fit into a Western knowledge framework. This use of the familiar to explain the new was a common feature of the writing of Victorian women travellers, even up to the end of the Meiji Period.”¹

“Waves of reform followed the Emperor Meiji’s assumption of power: the shogun and feudal samurai were stripped of their power; Tokyo became the seat of a centralized government and hundreds of European advisors imported to help Japan modernize. New role models were selected – Britain for a modern navy, France for an army, and Germany for a general staff. Although the progressives’ proclaimed goal was to modernize not Westernize, it became apparent that the two were

¹ Lorraine Sterry, *Victorian Women Travellers in Meiji Japan Discovering a New Land* (Folkestone: Global Oriental, 2009). 89.

interchangeable when government officials took up the waltz and quadrille as emblems of modernity.”²

“Despite the extremely tight supervision exercised by the Shogunate, Western learning continued to exist in Japan throughout the Edo period. Its devotees were interested primarily in the new scientific techniques that were being developed in the West. In the crucial 1830’s however, Japanese interest in Western learning began to change and increasingly Japanese were not attracted to its economic and political teachings. Also at this time curiosity was manifested in conditions in the West in general.”³

“The Japanese kimono, imported by the Dutch East India Company, had been adopted by European men as an indoor gown. Since the number of imported Japanese kimono gowns was not enough, oriental gowns made out of indienne appeared to supply demand...because of their exotic features and rarity, these gowns became symbols of status and wealth. At home, men wore them over a shirt and breeches, with a cap instead of wig. They were also apparently worn when entertaining close friends at home and for morning walks.”⁴

Annotated Bibliography

² Clark Worswick, *Japan, Photographs, 1854- 1905* (New York: Pennwick Publishing/Alfred A. Knopf, 1979) 37.

³ Masaaki Kosaka and David Abosch, *Japanese Thought in the Meiji Era* (Tokyo: Pan-Pacific Press, 1958), 7.

⁴ Akiko Fukai, *Fashion: The Collection of the Kyoto Costume Institute : A History from the 18th to the 20th Century* (Hong Kong: Taschen, 2006), 96.

Worswick, Clark. *Japan, Photographs, 1854-1905*. New York: Pennwick Publishing/ Alfred A. Knopf, 1979.

- This book is a compilation of photographs taken in Japan in the 19th century and it discusses the reasons for the surge in Japanese photos of this time, due to the West being introduced to Japan. This book is a great source of historic photographs of Japan at this time of change. The book also does a good job at clearly setting the scene in Japan at the time of their turn from isolation to globalization. It discusses some of the internal conflict due to this.

Sterry, Lorraine. *Victorian Women Travellers in Meiji Japan Discovering a New Land*. Folkestone: Global Oriental, 2009.

- This book is full of information regarding the West's interest in Japan and their exploration of it. It discusses the West's idea of Japan and how they perceived Japanese customs and practices. It has writings from these European women about their observations in Japan at the time.

Kosaka, Masaaki, and David Abosch. *Japanese Thought in the Meiji Era*. Tokyo: [Pan-Pacific Press], 1958.

- This book goes into further detail regarding the internal shifts and thoughts of the Japanese of the time of this changing. It discusses the Japanese's ideas of the West as well.

Fukai, Akiko. *Fashion: The Collection of the Kyoto Costume Institute : A History from the 18th to the 20th Century*. Hong Kong: Taschen, 2006.

- This book specifically shows the influence of Japan on Western fashion in the 19th century. It discusses items like buttons that Japan made specifically for export to the west and it discusses the westernization of the kimono and Japanese symbols in western textile designs.