

Survival or Success?

The Kimono Retail Industry in Contemporary Japan



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Abstract:

This thesis explores the ways in which the kimono retail industry in contemporary Japanese society is changing in response to the economic crisis of the 1990s and the declining popularity of the kimono as formal wear, leading to falling demand and sales. A central aim of this thesis is to address the lack of academic literature focused on the kimono, particularly economic aspects of the kimono such as the way it is made, sold and consumed. Based on twelve months of ethnographic fieldwork in Aichi prefecture, Kyoto, Tokyo and Yamagata with kimono shop owners, wholesalers, craftspeople, writers, bloggers, designers, government officials and consumers, this thesis explores how a small but influential group that I call the ‘kimono fashion network’ are aiming to change the industry from within by marketing the kimono as fashion and framing the kimono as a lifestyle choice. Their efforts have led to a monumental shift in manufacturing, marketing and selling strategies that have effectively aligned the kimono with global discourses about fashion. This shift has split the kimono retail industry into two camps: those who sell kimono as ceremonial wear for key ritual occasions such as weddings, funerals, tea ceremonies, coming of age ceremonies, graduation and school entrance ceremonies, and those who sell it for fashion. I begin by examining the socio-economic factors that led to falling demand and therefore falling sales in the industry, before exploring how the industry is structured in terms of production and distribution. Finally, I explore how and why the kimono fashion network have gone about changing the industry from within. Adding a different perspective to prevailing understandings of traditional culture in Japan as a vehicle for cultural nationalism, I argue that the contemporary kimono fashion movement has many similarities with the global phenomenon of lifestyle consumer culture to be found across industrialised nations.

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This thesis is dedicated to my deeply missed father, William Valk.

Your love and your blessing carried me over the finish line.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1. The kimono in Japan: an apparent paradox

A morning in January

It's 4:30 am on a cold morning in early January when the car draws up outside my house. I had arranged to meet Yumi Kameda about a month previously. Every year she helps young women get ready for their *seijin-shiki* (coming of age ceremony) at a salon in Kasugai, about an hour away from Toyota. The coming of age ceremony takes place every year across the whole of Japan at the beginning of January. Young people who will turn 20 in that year take part in the ceremony, and almost all young women wear long-sleeved kimono called *furisode* for their coming of age ceremonies.

I got into her car and as we drove she told me about how she came to help out with coming of age ceremonies in the salons.

'My mother passed away two years ago, but she used to be a *kitsuke*¹ teacher. She would help out at three different salons for the *seijin-shiki*.' She laughs. 'Basically she *made* me come with her to help! Now it's my aunt who has taken over.'

It's still dark when we arrive at the salon. *Furisode* dressing for *seijin-shiki* can take place inside kimono shops themselves, but typically young women are dressed in beauty salons, since kimono shops usually rent out *furisode* in fixed price sets including dressing, makeup and hair styling, and sometimes commemorative photography as well. As a result, kimono shops enter into arrangements with salons to provide these extra services. The process of dressing a young woman for *seijin-shiki* is so complex that very few people are capable of dressing their own daughters at home.

Coming of age ceremonies typically start at 10am. Getting dressed in a *furisode* is a complex, time-consuming operation, involving not just the actual dressing part, but also makeup and hair styling.

¹ *Kitsuke* is kimono dressing. *Kitsuke* teachers are professionals who teach women how to wear kimono or who dress women in kimono.



Young women are given staggered appointments to avoid waiting time, the earliest beginning at 4am or earlier. At the salon there were 6 helpers, including Kameda-san's aunt, who was directing the other helpers. One of the helpers stood waiting for the girls who had been dressed, and her role was to tell them how to walk, sit and go to the lavatory while wearing the somewhat cumbersome *furisode*.

There were nine young women in all. In some cases, their mothers were also there to observe the process, and one of them had strong opinions about how her daughter should be dressed, indicating to the helpers exactly how she thought the obi should be tied.

Kameda-san's job was to tie the obi. Obi are sashes about three meters in length that are wrapped twice around the waist and then tied behind the back.

There are many different possibilities for tying an obi, and the *furisode* features the most elaborate and complex ties of all, the idea being that young women should look *hanayaka* (bright and festive) for their coming of age ceremony. After the last young woman had gone, the helpers

and I went to a nearby *famiresu* (chain restaurant) to have breakfast and de-brief after the morning's events. Kameda-san had agreed to show me her mother's *tansu* (kimono dresser) and kimono at the family home where Kameda-san grew up. Her aunt had agreed to accompany us. I asked Kameda-san whether she herself wore kimono.

'You know, it's funny, everyone assumes that I know a lot about kimono because I can do *kitsuke* but actually I don't know very much about kimono.'

Kameda-san is not alone in this. There are many women who can dress others, and maybe even dress themselves, but do not actually know much about kimono and have little personal interest in them.

The family home was where Kameda-san's mother had had her *kitsuke* classroom. Kameda-san had moved away from Kasugai after she got married.

There was also a tea ceremony room, and one of Kameda-san's mother's pleasures was entertaining her guests and *kitsuke* pupils with the first tea ceremony of the New Year, which is a special occasion for tea ceremony practitioners, during which particularly elaborate kimono are worn. The tea ceremony room also contained the *butsudan*, the Buddhist altar where Japanese people make offerings to and remember their ancestors. Kameda-san knelt before the altar to pray for her mother. At a respectful distance, I murmured a silent prayer to her as well.

The classroom was a beautiful Japanese-style room with tatami flooring and sliding doors. The classroom was in immaculate condition, but there was a sense of emptiness; the room had not been used for some time. The *tansu* that her mother had used for her work was hidden behind sliding doors. *Tansu* come in a variety of styles. This one was made of paulownia wood on the inside (as is common with *tansu* as this type of wood guards the delicate silk against humidity) and a different wood on the outside. All *tansu* feature drawers that are wide enough to hold kimono, since kimono are stored folded flat rather than hung on a rail, usually in Japanese paper wrappings called *tatōshi*.

Kameda-san opened up the *tansu* and started taking some of the kimono out.

'Here they are, just as she left them. I have no idea what's in here,' she said softly. 'I haven't looked for 2 years. After my mother died, I should have sorted through them, but, somehow I didn't.'

She only showed me the ones in the classroom.

‘The other *tansu* is in my father’s room. He’s in hospital at the moment but I would rather not take the kimono out from there if you don’t mind.’

Kimono after kimono emerged from the classroom *tansu*. Kameda-san and her aunt tried to guess what they were or what techniques went into making them. Eventually Kameda-san looked to her aunt and asked, ‘what should we do? What should we do about all of these kimono?’



It was not said aloud, but I am sure that it was emotionally difficult for Kameda-san and her aunt to show me these kimono, to literally open up memories of the mother and sister they had lost. There was a sense of sadness, and more than that of helplessness – what to do with kimono that were replete with memories and meanings, kimono that had been her mother’s life work, kimono that she herself was not going to wear?

An afternoon in April

It is unseasonably warm for April. The morning's torrential rain would seem like a dream had it not left its signature humidity behind as an unmistakable sign of its passage through Aichi.

I am sitting in a car again, this time in the back of Takashi and Kyoko Onoda's car. Their friends, Ryoko Tanisako, Tomoe and Takaaki Yamada and Miyuki Goto are there as well. The Onodas are a sociable couple, and for them this means having a big eight-seater car that friends can ride in. There is not a quiet moment in the car. There hardly ever is when we get together. Someone is always talking or laughing. And, importantly, everyone is wearing a kimono. In fact, on this day it would be a major faux-pas not to wear one.

People from all social classes, professions and walks of life are converging on the Nagoya Agricultural Center to take part in the Aichi Kimono de Jack (hereafter KdJ for short) event taking place in April. They are all different, but they all have the same aim in mind: wear a kimono, and wear it with style. They are all involved in what they call 'the kimono lifestyle', though they all express this in a different way. Some, like Kyoko and Takashi, wear kimono for days out, festivals, special events and KdJ. They dress to impress. Others make a point of being deliberately understated, while some claim to wear the kimono every day, having forsaken Western clothes completely. Some are weekend wearers. Others might be wearing a kimono for the first time. The kimono is quite unforgiving in that, to the trained eye, the way you wear it immediately reveals your level of familiarity with the garment.

KdJ members speak of being '*kinarete iru*' – this means 'being used to wearing a kimono' but the translation into English is altogether too simplistic. '*Kinarete iru*' refers not only to yourself as being used to wearing the kimono but giving the impression of being used to the kimono. That sense of effortlessness, of having 'tamed' the kimono as if it were an alien being, is conveyed through the skill with which the kimono is worn, the aesthetic choices (often respected even if they differ from the observer's) that are made and an almost unqualifiable sense of ease with which it is worn, usually conveyed through movements such as walking, sitting or standing. For the KdJ community it can also mean the ability or confidence to break established canons, such as sitting cross-legged. If someone is uncomfortable wearing a kimono it tends to show, although it can take time to learn to read levels of familiarity with the kimono. The keys to becoming '*kinarete iru*' are

time and effort, and being able to give off an aura of ease and confidence is something which all members aspire to, consciously or not.²

At KdJ gatherings, people are watching. In fact, the main purpose is to come and observe. What are you wearing? How are you wearing it? Are you wearing it well? What colours and what accessories do you choose? Where did you get them, and more importantly, where can *I* get them? Kyoko was later to tell me, when she had fondly made matching pairs of *tabi* socks for herself and for me, that even if you were ‘bursting with the need to show people, you still had to wait for them to notice.’ I waited, people noticed and commented, and as I watched her grin and punch the air, that it was indeed really rather satisfying to have waited – and of course to have been noticed.

This is not to say that the advanced members of KdJ are harsh on beginners. They tend to flock to new faces with nervous dispositions and awkwardly put together outfits. Having been one too, I experienced how the community urged me, sometimes directly but mostly indirectly, to improve both my dressing skills and my taste. Watching them, particularly Kyoko, was to shape what I conceived of as my own kimono style. Friendship groups had blossomed in the community, and each group tended to have its own style. This was not altogether surprising since, as was the case with me, gifts and items bought in each other’s company often were displayed on our bodies and outfits. Doing this allowed us to both please the person who had given the gift and signal the importance of that relationship to others in the community. Kimono de Jack holds six gatherings a year, one every two months. The ‘Jack’ comes from ‘highjack’, the idea being to ‘highjack’ a venue by filling it with people wearing kimono. Participation is free, and events are specially chosen to allow participants to move freely within venues that, in the vast majority of cases, do not charge. The idea supposedly developed in Kyoto, as a way to give people an opportunity to wear kimono, and to stir a wish to wear the kimono within onlookers. The formula is always the same: you can come when you like, you can leave whenever you like. The organisers take two group photos at different times so as to make sure that people arriving late or leaving early do not miss a photo opportunity. They also do a headcount to see how many people came to the event. One of the photos will always feature the Jack members lifting a fist as they say ‘Jakku da!’ (‘This is Jack!’). The other will feature participants lined up with their left foot slightly forward (to show off their *zori* shoes and *tabi*) and KdJ leader Yoshihide Shibakawa, in the middle of the group.

² A similar expression is ‘*kikonashite iru*’ which means to have ‘mastered wearing’ something, and this phrase refers more to the technical aspects of having learned how to wear a kimono.





Sometimes, photographs are taken of women and men in separate groups as well. The task of taking photographs falls to Takashi, who happily has a passion for photography, an eye for detail and a jovial determination to arrange people into neat, photo-friendly positions. It is also Takashi who uploads the photos to the Facebook page.

Aichi prefecture boasts the largest number of participants and the most active community among all prefectures with a KdJ presence. At any given event, there are usually between 60 and 110 people. Aichi also boasts a consistently large number of male participants, rising by the year. The vitality of the KdJ community is down to their leaders. Yoshihide Shibakawa is nominally the leader – KdK prefectural leaders are given numbers, and he is Aichi’s number one. In reality, much of the running of KdJ is left to his part-time worker Kyoko Onoda and her husband Takashi. But it is doubtless the pull of Azumaya, owned by Yoshihide Shibakawa, and its casual cotton kimono, relaxed atmosphere and strong internet presence which fuels the ranks of the KdJ events, and many members are also customers (see Chapters 4 and 5).

Kimono-wearing is normally subject to a long list of strict rules regarding how to put it on, but also with regards to material, pattern and season that I refer to as the ‘kimono canon’, and the vast majority of Japanese people are totally unaware of these rules. A key aspect of the kimono

canon is that kimono should be accessorized with Japanese things rather than Western things, so wearing shoes rather than kimono-appropriate traditional shoes such as *zori* or *geta* is frowned on as ‘improper’. The issue of the rules is a contentious one in the KdJ community. Some are sticklers for the rules and would not consider wearing sandals or shoes. Others take a relaxed, somewhat irreverent, approach and wear shoes instead of *zori*, and others dress up with samurai helmets or ninja outfits for children. Some are deliberately out to surprise others with bright colours and arrangements. Even a KdJ ‘traditionalist’ like Kyoko, with her love of statement accessories, would still be considered something of a rule-breaker by the standards of Japanese people acquainted with the kimono outside of KdJ. KdJ is a community, with its established fashion icons, outliers and nervous aspiring initiates. And everyone there is in no doubt that they are, in their own way, fashionable.

I witnessed, then, what appeared to be a strange paradox. On the one hand, throughout my fieldwork, I got to know a great many people like Kameda-san: people whose mothers had been intimately acquainted with the kimono, who might even have made their lives around it. And yet, Kameda-san’s mother’s generation, women now in their 60s, 70s and 80s, had by and large been unsuccessful in transmitting kimono culture to their daughters. This is striking in the case of Kameda-san’s mother, who was a *kitsuke* teacher. Kameda-san might have assimilated the knowledge to dress others for their special day, but kimono had no role in her own life. Quite the contrary, they evoked a sense of despair in her: ‘what shall we do with all these kimono?’ Great collections of kimono lie unused, ‘sleeping in their *tansu*’, as the Japanese would say (*tansu de nemutte iru*).

On the other hand, at the KdJ events, I saw people very much engaged with the kimono – in fact, wearing Japanese clothes of some description is the only requirement to attend a Jack event. I saw people of all ages and from all walks of life, actively wearing the kimono. Some, although not many, had made the decision to wear the kimono every day and shunned *yōfuku* (Western clothes) completely. For others, it is a fashion choice for their days off, something to step out in, a kimono ‘lifestyle’. Among the people who had adopted a ‘kimono lifestyle’ were some who bought second-hand kimono, very similar to the kimono that lay sleeping in Kameda-san’s mother’s *tansu*. For yet more, it is something they collect, obsessively in some cases, and blog about their own particular ‘style’, inspiring others to imitate them. In other words, I saw a culture that was very

much alive, and, strikingly for a so-called ‘traditional’ garment, this culture was one which belonged to the world of fashion, consumption and lifestyle, to which traditional garments are typically considered opposed (Entwistle 2015).

My research was born out of my curiosity with regards to this apparent contradiction, a wish to understand what appeared, on the surface, to be a paradox. How has the image and purpose of the kimono changed throughout the 20th century, and what were the momentous cultural, social and economic shifts in the 20th century that had both filled Kameda-san’s mother’s *tansu* and then consigned them to sleep there untouched and unworn? What was the role of the kimono industry, which is itself all but totally absent from any literature in English or Japanese on the kimono, in shaping contemporary kimono culture such as deciding on trends and types of kimono? Is the playful appropriation of the kimono by KdJ a sign that the role of the kimono is changing in the 21st century? Is the part of the kimono industry which I call the ‘kimono fashion network’ (the main focus of Chapters 4 and 5) and their shift from providing ceremonial wear to fashion the sign of a sea change for kimono culture? And finally, does this apparent revival suggest that kimono, and therefore perhaps other forms of traditional culture, can be ‘updated’ to stay relevant in contemporary Japan even in the face of struggling sales?

One might also ask, why does it matter if the kimono continues to exist in Japanese society? Particularly if one contrasts Japan with other modern nations, such as European nations, for whom traditional dress is a distant memory. It matters, I argue, because the kimono was deeply entrenched as everyday wear until World War Two, at least for women, and as such for the Japanese the kimono is not such a distant memory. After the war, the kimono continued to be deeply implicated in ritual and ceremonial life in Japanese society, particularly when it comes to key life cycle events such as coming of age ceremonies, graduation, school entrance ceremonies, visiting temples, and many other events. The kimono is showing signs of gradually retreating from these arenas of ritual life (see Chapter 2), and from an anthropological perspective, tracing the ebb and flow of the kimono’s use, in ceremonial wear or, as is increasingly the case, fashion wear, allows us to monitor the deep implications of traditional clothing in socio-cultural change. The kimono is showing signs of undergoing a revival as fashion wear. This revival is a major theme in this thesis, explored fully in Chapters 4 and 5. I trace the changes undergone by the kimono, and the role played by the industry in these changes, which enables us to shed light on the interplay between economic activity and culture. The kimono is an economic object, a commodity which is made and sold, and

as a result there is an entire industry implicated in its creation. While the revenue generated by the industry is only roughly equivalent to what one of Japan's single large car companies might make in a year, if the entire industry was to collapse it would have a cultural and economic impact on Japanese society as a whole. For all these reasons, the role of the kimono in Japanese society, and how this role will change, are important to consider.

I aim to answer all of these questions in this thesis by emphasising the economic aspects of the kimono as an item of material culture embedded in an economic system. I will also show how the industry shaped kimono culture in the 20th century and investigate the socio-economic forces that brought the industry to its knees in the 1990s. Finally, I will explore how a small group of retailers that I call the 'kimono fashion network' are aiming to change the industry from within by marketing the kimono as fashion and framing the kimono as a lifestyle choice. I will analyse what appears to be their growing success in terms of the industry and changes which continue to shape Japanese culture more widely.

In the next section I will contextualise my research within my field sites and elucidate my methods. I also include an overview of what exactly the kimono is.

2. Methodology

2.1 Evolution of the project

My project evolved once I arrived in Japan in October 2015, and it did so partly out of necessity. As outlined in my initial research plan and my Transfer of Status document, I had planned to study *kitsuke* or kimono dressing academies, more specifically the Cultural Foundation and the Sōdō Kimono Academy (hereafter Sōdō). My host mother from my year abroad in Nagoya, Sachiko Ishikawa, introduced me to the Cultural Foundation. She had taken classes with the Cultural Foundation after people in the neighbourhood had started to ask her to dress them in kimono for weddings and other occasions. She felt that if people were going to ask her to do this and remunerate her, then she needed training and a formal qualification. Of the five people she encouraged to take the course with her, only she graduated successfully. In November 2013, while I was working in Japan on the JET Programme and on one of my frequent return visits to Sachiko's home, she took me to a kimono show put on by the Cultural Foundation and I witnessed their combined strategy of putting on both classes and performances in which they showcase the extent to which their students have mastered wearing of kimono and advertise their services to potential new members. This show in particular aimed to represent different types of kimono, from historical Heian court regalia to modern day wedding attire, and was set to music in a dramatic and appealing fashion. There were also speeches from senior members of the organisation. Helped by Sachiko, I made contact with the senior administrative official after the show and explained what my then research proposal was, and she expressed interest and willingness to assist me. They arranged for me to wear a *jūni hitoe* (a twelve layer kimono worn by Heian court noblewomen) the next day, and I got a glimpse into the offices and classroom of Fushimi ward (Nagoya). This encounter, made possible through Sachiko, was to form the basis of my research proposal for my DPhil. My research plan was to investigate the intersection of the *kitsuke* academy as a business with its self-styled role as the preserver of knowledge and tradition as it relates to kimono and kimono dressing. However, although I had secured the agreement of the main administrator in the Nagoya office to conduct fieldwork with the Cultural Foundation, my attempts to meet up in person once I had arrived in Japan to discuss the particulars of the fieldwork were consistently turned down. Arrangements would be cancelled at the last minute, much to my own dismay but also that of the

teacher in the Cultural Foundation with whom I had become acquainted. After two months, I decided that it was time to put my plan B into action.

My plan B, as outlined in my Transfer of Status document, was to visit women in my neighbourhood and ask them to show me their collections of kimono and also their *tansu* – kimono storage closets. Since I lived in her home and spoke to her often about my research, Sachiko had witnessed my struggles with the Cultural Foundation. Once I told her about my plan B, she lost no time introducing me to her friends throughout Toyota, asking them on my behalf to show me their kimono. All of them agreed. In total, I conducted 21 home visits in the 12 months that I was in Japan, and 11 of which were visits made to friends of Sachiko's, including Kameda-san whose story is featured at the beginning of my thesis. Later on in my fieldwork, the Cultural Foundation teachers who had befriended me (and no doubt who also felt sorry that my project with them had not worked) showed me their own collections and also introduced me to their friends who in turn showed me their kimono. Before long, women were asking to be participants in my research. This snowballing method enabled me to trace friendship networks and expand my pool of participants while giving each participant an active role in my research design.

When I began my home visits, I predicted that most of Sachiko's friends and acquaintances were relatively affluent since many of them were related in some way to Toyota Motors – usually because their husbands worked there, although some had nothing to do with the firm at all. I also accounted for Toyota having a slightly more 'traditional' mindset than in larger urban centres, even Nagoya which is not after all so far away. The junior researchers at Nanzan University's Anthropological Institute with whom I discussed my research said that I was likely to encounter more traditional mindsets and values in Toyota than in Nagoya or other urban centres. I entered my participants' homes with these thoughts in mind, and as such I expected these women to have a number of expensive kimono in their homes. However, what I was completely unprepared for was the sheer number of kimono. I quickly learned that unless I asked to see specific types of kimono (for example, kimono that the women's mothers had made for them when they were young, or formal kimono) then I could easily end up spending four hours in someone's home. In most cases, there were simply that many. Whilst I had expected there be on average 30 kimono and obi per woman, there were easily 50, 100, 200 or more. Naturally, I was fascinated by the sheer abundance of these kimono. This was consistent across the board with all 22 of the participants who showed me their collections, regardless of their wealth and social status. I began to think of

what these women had in common. Apart from one of them, Kyoko Onoda (who I will discuss later and who is a special case), they were all aged between 50 and 75, and all of them, without exception, mentioned that a large part of their kimono collection consisted of *oyome-iri dōgu*, or bridal trousseaus. In their generation, it was standard practice to give every daughter who was about to get married a full bridal trousseau consisting of, among other things, a *tansu* filled with a range of kimono going from ‘casual’ kimono made from wool that would typically be worn at New Year celebrations to ‘formal’ kimono such as *hōmongi*, which are made of silk and usually feature elaborate traditional designs that are painted or embroidered onto the silk using a variety of techniques, most commonly Yūzen dye. Many of these women (though not all) were keen kimono collectors, and they often bought themselves and/or their daughters kimono. In addition, they often accumulated kimono given to them by friends and relatives, but always, at the core of their collection, were the bridal trousseaus. These women are the focus of Chapter Two and I shall explain in more detail the custom of bridal trousseaus. For now, suffice to say that I was fascinated by the sheer abundance of these kimono and the paradox that they apparently presented: here were tremendous collections, and yet by their own admission, women hardly ever wore them. I became increasingly curious about these kimono and where they came from, and I began to ask these women where they bought their kimono and why.

This question led me to an inevitable conclusion: in order to understand this paradox of owning without wearing, I had to get to know kimono as products that are part of an *economic system*. In other words, I had to get to know the kimono industry itself, and I had to start by approaching kimono shops. I had been given fair warning about the industry by well-intentioned researchers at the Nanzan University Anthropological Institute that the kimono industry, renowned for being secretive and conservative, would be difficult for me to approach. Initially, I found this to be indeed the case: approaching shop owners without third party introductions proved largely unsuccessful. However, asking acquaintances to introduce me to people they knew who worked in some way shape or form in the industry functioned very well, and once I was known to shop owners, they began to explain to me how the industry was set up. Snowball sampling, also referred to as network research since it enables the researcher to map social networks organically with minimal external interference (LeCompte and Schensul 2010: 75) proved to be an effective method to recruit participants in my research and trace key social relationships. For instance, allowing a shop owner to introduce me to their contacts in the wholesale industry enabled me to tell what

echelon of the industry they occupied on the formal kimono vs fashion kimono spectrum. Following friendship and business networks organically allowed me to understand how these partnerships worked and the nature of the relationships between people.

It became clear to me that behind the shops was a chain of distribution composed of wholesalers, manufacturers (often called *mēkā* in Japanese – from the English ‘maker’) and finally, craftspeople and workshops. I learnt that this chain of distribution had been consolidated largely in the second half of the 20th century, and was intimately tied up with Japanese economic success in the 1970s and 80s, and recession in the 1990s and 2000s. I learnt that the industry was in many ways responsible for the formalisation of the kimono in the 20th century and therefore the colossal *tansu* collections I had witnessed. Looking at the industry answered the questions that contemporary kimono culture produced. In other words, the central premise of this thesis is to stress the importance of considering the role of the industry, the way that kimono are manufactured and sold, and that the economic aspect of the kimono is inseparable from the cultural side.

Initially, I struggled to reconcile my two main bodies of data – from women in my neighbourhood and their *tansu* to my data from kimono shops, wholesalers and craft workshops – but I came to the realisation that the two data sets were intimately linked. The link between them is that although both groups are involved in kimono culture, there seems to be little communication at all between them. Middle-aged women who were left as the guardians of the huge collections in their *tansu* were largely unaware of the emergence of a ‘fashion’ kimono, whilst wearers of the ‘fashion’ kimono were often younger, and in many cases had not been the recipients of the kimono as an inherited *tansu*. The fabulous *tansu* of the middle-aged participants in my neighbourhood are a testimony of the kimono industry’s heyday and the short-lived (though formidable at its time) success of the formal silk kimono as a prestige item. This is why, in my thesis, the *tansu* is the starting point for exploring kimono culture and the kimono industry (Chapter 2). Unlike the eye-catching kimono of *geisha* which so captivate Western imagination, these virtually unexplored, unknown and yet vast collections of kimono tell a much more interesting story of the evolution of Japanese dress in the 20th and 21st centuries. Finally, there is an overarching thread in both data sets: the survival of the kimono. My participants in my local neighbourhood and my participants in the kimono industry were ultimately concerned about the same thing. When a middle-aged woman opens her *tansu* drawers and asks herself ‘will anyone ever wear these kimono?’ and when a shop owner asks himself whether his returns will keep him in business another year, they are

ultimately thinking about the same thing: what is the future of the kimono? Will it survive? Japan's continued use of traditional dress is, in many ways, remarkable – compared to its closest neighbours, Korea and China, the kimono has remained far more entrenched than the Korean *hanbok* or the Chinese *cheongsam* (also known as *qipao*). But now the kimono's future seems to hang in the balance. The ultimate goal of this thesis is to hint as to what the kimono's future might be.

2.2 Setting, positionality and methods



http://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=4463&lang=en (retrieved 22/01/2017)

I conducted 12 months of fieldwork based in Toyota, Aichi prefecture, located about an hour away from the large city of Nagoya. I was affiliated with Nanzan University's Anthropological Institute in Nagoya, who sponsored my application for a visa. Located in the centre of Japan on the historic Tokaido road that links Tokyo with Kyoto, Aichi prefecture is known as a centre of industry and technology rather than one of art and culture, particularly famous

for its aerospace and automobiles industries. The headquarters of Toyota Motors are located in the eponymous city of Toyota, an hour outside of Nagoya.



http://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=29160&lang=en (retrieved 22/01/2017)

Although Toyota has a population of just over 420,000 it is dwarfed by its much larger neighbour Nagoya: with 2.28 million people, Nagoya is Japan's 3rd largest city. There is also a cultural divide between the two cities. Whilst Nagoya belongs to the Owari region, Toyota belongs to the Mikawa half of Aichi prefecture. The two 'halves' have slightly different dialects and customs. Until 1959 when the name was changed to 'Toyota', the city was named Koromo. Toyota Motors remains, to this day, one of the main employers in the city, and the reason why many people consider Toyota's inhabitants to be wealthy. In reality, there are social and economic

divides in the city. Toyota Motors attracts many Brazilians of Japanese descent, whose living conditions are typically below those of the Japanese. Official paperwork, unlike most parts of Japan, tends to be written in Japanese and Portuguese, rather than English. Among the Japanese population, there is still a tendency to differentiate between the ‘native’ Mikawa people and those who came from ‘outside’ seeking work in Toyota Motors.

In my initial research proposal, I had planned to use participant observation and semi-structured interviews and I had imagined that these two things would be very distinct from one another but in actual fact, they tended to blend into each other. As my fieldwork progressed, I understood that the nature of my fieldwork itself called for rigid boundaries between method styles, as I perceived them, to fall away. As Karen O’Reilly has argued, ethnography is in and of itself ‘difficult to define because it is used in diverse ways in a wide range of disciplines drawing on different traditions (O’Reilly 2012: 1).

My *tansu* fieldwork, conducted with local women in the Toyota, Kariya, Nagoya and Okazaki areas was, as I have stated, part of my plan B and I recruited participants through my main gatekeeper Sachiko, and then through other key participants as well. Participants also came forward of their own volition. As such the recruitment method could be described as snowballing, attracting participants in a natural manner. Sometimes I would be alone and then the visits would take on a more ‘interview-type’ form, but even so I would describe the visits as a blend of participant observation and unstructured interviews. I knew some of the questions I would ask, but there was a whole ritual to the visits: tea would be served, sometimes snacks. With participants I knew I could meet with more often, I would ask to see photographs of the times they and their family members had worn kimono. Sometimes my participants would also show me photographs without being prompted, which enabled me to engage in spontaneous photo-elicitation.

I would ask my questions when I sensed an opening, usually when the *tansu* and the kimono were being showed. No two visits were entirely the same. These social calls could last from one and half hours up to five hours. Often the gatekeepers themselves would accompany me, in which case I was privy to conversations as well as asking questions myself. I experienced, then, the discomfort of wanting to follow a carefully crafted methodology and dealing with the spontaneity and unpredictability of the field. This is no doubt one of fieldwork’s quintessential problems, the challenge of finding a method that ‘must be purposive without being deterministic’ (Fernandez and Herzfel in Bernard and Gravlee 2015: 61). James Fernandez and Michael Herzfeld go on to

say that we are then faced with the task of trying to ‘condition and control through pathlike procedures the presence of pure randomness and contingency’ (*ibid* 2015: 61). My answer to this problem in the case of some, though not all, my field sites, was to relinquish a rigorously structured methodological inquiry for one which favoured above all what my participants would do and say. I abandoned quite early the option of using quantitative methods such as questionnaires as I realised I wanted to elicit in-depth responses from my participants. As Robert Weiss notes in his work on the interview as a method, ‘if we depart from the survey approach in the direction of tailoring our interview to each respondent, we gain in the coherence, depth, and density of the material each respondent provides’ (Weiss 1995: 3). I would sometimes steer the conversation towards topics of interest but mostly I would allow much of the conversation to unfold organically. Thus I could train myself to hear similarities and differences between participant responses.

The four shops I became the most acquainted with are Azumaya (located in Nishio), Go-Ichi-Maru (a branch of which was located in Toyota, with a larger parent shop in neighbouring Gifu prefecture), Kyorei (located in Toyota) and Kawahiraya (located in Toyota). Of these four, Azumaya is the one at the heart of chapter 4 and 5 in this thesis. As with most kimono shops in Japan, these shops are family-owned. With the notable exception of Go-Ichi-Maru, I quickly learned that simply walking into a shop and asking to speak with the owner about their business was unlikely to yield any lasting relationship that could lead to ethnographic data. Several attempts to establish relationships with shops failed due to lack of adequate introductions. The Goto family, who run Go-Ichi-Maru, were unusually receptive to my walking in unannounced.

It was much more productive, not to mention culturally appropriate, to be introduced by a third party who would vouch for me. Junko Kusunoki, a research participant in Toyota and a friend of my host mother, introduced me to Kyoko Onoda, who works part-time at Azumaya. Getting to know Kyoko proved to be a turning point in my fieldwork, both personally and from the point of view of research. Meeting Kyoko was a moment of serendipity, since not only was she willing to introduce me to her workplace and Azumaya’s shop owner Yoshihide Shibakawa, but she was also to become one of my closest friends. I had the good fortune of finding a key participant whom I get on with very well. Shibakawa-san’s trust in Kyoko meant that I was allowed to spend many days in Azumaya, simply observing the Shibakawa family at work. When they had time, Shibakawa-san and his mother would speak with me or would involve me in their activities. The owner’s mother took particular delight in helping me polish my *kitsuke* skills. By the end of my

fieldwork, I was invited to any events that Azumaya held, sometimes as an observer, sometimes actively helping them set up events, usually accompanying Kyoko and taking her lead. Kyoko was invaluable since she always made clear the extent to which I could involve myself and participate in the events, and when it was better for me to make myself scarce. I also became a customer, and bought two kimono, one obi and also had several kimono that were given to me resized at Azumaya. This level of commitment was important, since it demonstrated both loyalty and that I liked kimono (a point I will discuss in greater length in chapters 4 and 5). I should emphasise that this was no deception on my part. As you might suspect, I fully wanted what I consumed.

Go-Ichi-Maru is a second-hand kimono shop in Toyota, owned by the Goto family. The second-hand shop is a fairly recent venture, and the family owns a traditional kimono shop in Kasamatsu (Gifu). The Gotos, too, were open-minded and welcoming, and they allowed me to work every Saturday in their Toyota shop for 4 hours. While I say work, I was mostly observing and occasionally I would help at the till or I would fold kimono and obi. I had one kimono made up at Go-Ichi-Maru and I also bought several kimono accessories. I was introduced to Kyorei through my host mother. I went to three events organised by Kyorei, which gave me ample opportunity to observe the owner, Nagasaka-san, and her sales strategies. I bought some accessories from Kyorei.

Kawahiraya was the shop I had the least contact with, perhaps because I only gained an introduction in May 2016, halfway through my fieldwork. I interviewed the owner and attended one of their events. In this case, I did use semi-structured interviews since my time with them was limited and access was understood to be one-off and therefore participant observation would not be possible. As Fontein argues, interviews can be a practical method of acquiring data rapidly and, by virtue of being arranged in advance, interviews enable the fieldworker to home in on the topics and themes that she or he is researching and thus maximise available time (in Konopinski 2014: 55). I did not become a customer at Kawahiraya. My level of involvement in each site was different, and I had to measure carefully when I was willing to become a customer and thus involve myself in a deeper, more complex relationship. My willingness to become a customer in a sense reflected my degree of loyalty. It could also be argued that I am at one level implicated in the commercial activities of the businesses I built relationships with. Of course, I was a customer, and while I have never been asked to sell anything (and I am certain that it is extremely unlikely that I would be

asked) I have been involved in representing the interests of the ‘kimono fashion network’³. Most recently this involved inviting Yoshihide Shibakawa, owner of the shop Azumaya, to come and give a talk at St Cross College in November 2017. Using a question and answer format in which I asked Shibakawa-san questions and then interpreted his answers into English, the talk mainly revolved around his life as a kimono shop owner. Shibakawa-san did also speak about his wish for more people to wear the kimono and his hopes that members of the audience would feel closer to kimono culture as a result of the talk. My involvement in commercial activities is then quite marginal, but my involvement in representing their interests coincides with their belief that making the kimono less rigidly bound by rules and codes and making it more fashionable and appealing for younger generations represents a positive change for kimono culture, one which is more likely to ensure the culture’s survival long-term. In cold, practical terms, Japanese people would be perfectly fine if every last kimono were to disappear from the face of the earth. Many of my participants in the industry were happy to say this themselves. Japan would certainly not suffer. Nonetheless, I believe, as they do, that if this culture was to disappear entirely, it would represent a loss for Japanese society generally speaking in terms of the techniques, knowledge and ways of being, moving and wearing that are associated with making and wearing kimono. Facing this potential reality, the disappearance of the kimono, is another way in which the kimono fashion network distinguish themselves from the rest of the industry, which is often fatalistic and pessimistic about the future of the kimono. The kimono fashion network takes a much more positive, pro-active stance in their conviction that the kimono will endure, and that change is key to its long-term survival. While my sympathies might be aligned with this desire to preserve the kimono as Japanese fashion, I have endeavoured to maintain objectivity with regards to the methods used by the network to propagate this message (see Chapter 5).

While the bulk of my data was collected in Aichi prefecture, I would also follow my participants’ networks when they led outside of Aichi. The historical and modern-day heart of the kimono industry is indubitably Kyoto, with a smaller business centre in Tokyo. As a result, my snowballing method of recruiting research participants led me to follow business networks to Kyoto, and I made frequent trips to interview wholesalers and craftspeople. Throughout this thesis, I make sure to highlight the location of the field sites, particularly since the tension between the

³ The group of retailers, wholesalers, craftspeople, customers and writers who want to reinvent the kimono as a fashion item and change people’s attitudes towards the kimono.

geographical heart of the industry in Kyoto and the more peripheral nature of my field sites in Aichi produced some interesting dynamics, as I shall discuss in later chapters. In addition, my contact with the kimono shop Azumaya led me to make a field trip to Yonezawa, Yamagata prefecture, in the north of Japan. Using contacts from previous stays in Japan, I also made a field trip to Kanazawa to visit Kaga Yūzen dye workshops. Finally, when I aimed to investigate the role of the government in policies pertaining to the kimono, I visited the Tokyo Research Institute for Cultural Properties and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry in Tokyo. Even in these more formal environments, I stuck to semi-structured interviews so as to expand more freely on topics that seemed pressing to them, something that I felt they would not be able to do with a rigid structured interview.

In terms of my positionality, as a young, white woman, I occupied an interesting position with regards to my research participants. Broadly speaking, Japanese people tend to be welcoming towards white foreigners (Bestor and Steinhoff 2003: 270) although some may feel a little intimidated or worried at the prospect that they might need to speak English. Speaking English is a subject of anxiety for a large number of Japanese people who do not feel confident enough with their language skills to speak freely. Given that I speak relatively fluent Japanese, this fear was usually quickly dissipated and many participants expressed relief that they could speak Japanese with me. I noticed that this fluency tended to impact how my participants saw me: among the KdJ members who were to also become my friends, if I was to suddenly speak English (usually for comic effect), this would prompt laughter and a comment along the lines of ‘Julie just turned into a foreigner’. This became something of a recurring joke, the punchline of which would be ‘well actually, I have something to confess to you: I *am* a foreigner’. Together with my participants, playing with the unambiguous nature of my foreignness (my appearance) and my ambiguity-inducing fluency enabled us to manage my transition into ‘in-group’ status while acknowledging that I was also an outsider. Humour enabled us all to handle the potential discomfort of my blurring the in-group/out-group boundary. With participants that I met with less regularly and with whom I used interviews to gather data, my positionality usually helped in that, as an outsider, I was viewed as someone to teach and to impart information to. This phenomenon of the anthropologist⁴

⁴ Many anthropologists experience and utilise this role, but I might hazard that young, female anthropologists with ‘outsider status’ are particularly likely to experience this.

as someone needing to be taught has long been noted by anthropologists (see Katy Gardner's account of her fieldwork in Bangladesh for a classic example; in Watson 1999).

I was also aware of the norms of Japanese society, in that introductions from trusted parties are crucial in order to be able to conduct fieldwork. The contributors to the volume *Doing Fieldwork in Japan* consistently 'emphasize the need for introductions from a third party in order to obtain research access' (Bestor, Steinhoff and Bestor 2003: 14). They also note that 'such introductions involve the standard Japanese cultural practice of borrowing trust from other people in order to gain access to a new situation, which carries complex obligations to act responsibly and not misuse or damage the trust' (*ibid* 14). In this way, my key participants or gatekeepers were also my 'social guarantors' (*ibid* 14) and my behaviour reflected upon them. Since I was living with a Japanese family I was already well acquainted with, it was relatively easy for me to access people's homes since my host mother Sachiko could vouch for me and I was symbolically attached to her family – and therefore trustworthy. Kyoko proved to be my gatekeeper for Azumaya and the Shibakawa family, and ultimately the entire extended kimono fashion network. Often without my having to ask her, Kyoko would take me to meet members of the community, or sense when I needed an introduction in order to initiate a conversation with someone I had just met. My gradual induction into Azumaya's extended network meant that people became accustomed to seeing me, and gradually my presence became expected and natural. I like to think that I am seen as an ally – a well-disposed researcher, or as Shibakawa-san likes to say, a 'bona fide third party'.

The nature of my fieldwork required me to master wearing the kimono and explore what it means to be a white foreigner wearing the kimono. Many participants might have found it strange (but were too polite to say so), but still more were keen (and I believe genuinely so) for me to be able to do so. Kyoko in particular was fiercely adamant that I should not fall below the standards expected of Japanese people and she became very protective of me in that she did not want me to be judged as less knowledgeable than Japanese people.

I was simultaneously an outsider but, given the relatively non-controversial nature of my research, participants were often keen to speak with me, educate me and socialise with me. I was wary never to force encounters or push beyond boundaries that were, usually gently, presented to me as non-negotiable.

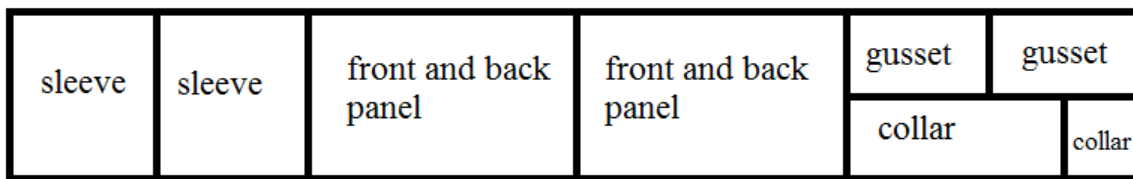
2.3 What is a kimono?

In this section, I give a few clarifications about what a kimono actually is. It may help a reader unfamiliar with the topic in understanding every part of the thesis that is to follow. ‘Kimono’ is a word that means many different things to different people. In a Euro-American context, it has come to mean something like ‘dressing gown’, invoking an image of something that can be slipped on and off quite easily. This idea originated with the kimono that were imported to Europe in the 19th century during the height of Japonisme and which wealthy women slipped on like gowns without wearing a belt (Fukai 1996). Even nowadays, I have found, it is quite common to see dressing gowns labelled as ‘kimono’ in women’s clothes shops in the UK. Kimono are also often associated with women only, and it can come as a shock to people unfamiliar with Japan that kimono for men do exist. There are however historical reasons behind this perception of the kimono as female-only, as I shall discuss later on in this section. In fact, kimono, for both men and women, are T-shaped constructions that are tailored in a very different way from Western clothes. Western clothes are tailored to fit the body, whereas kimono, along with the sari and Southeast

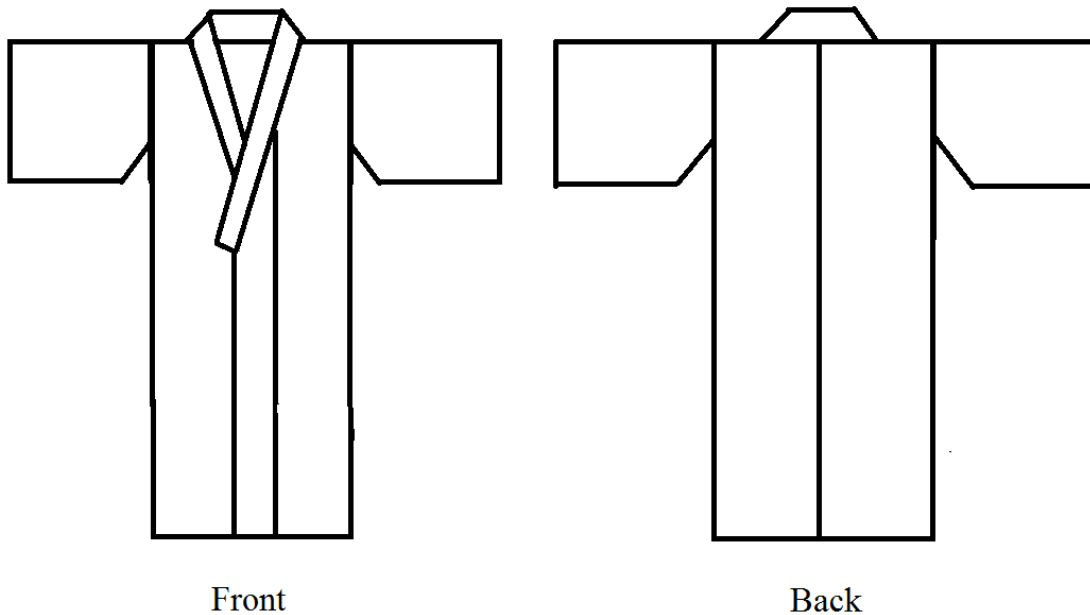


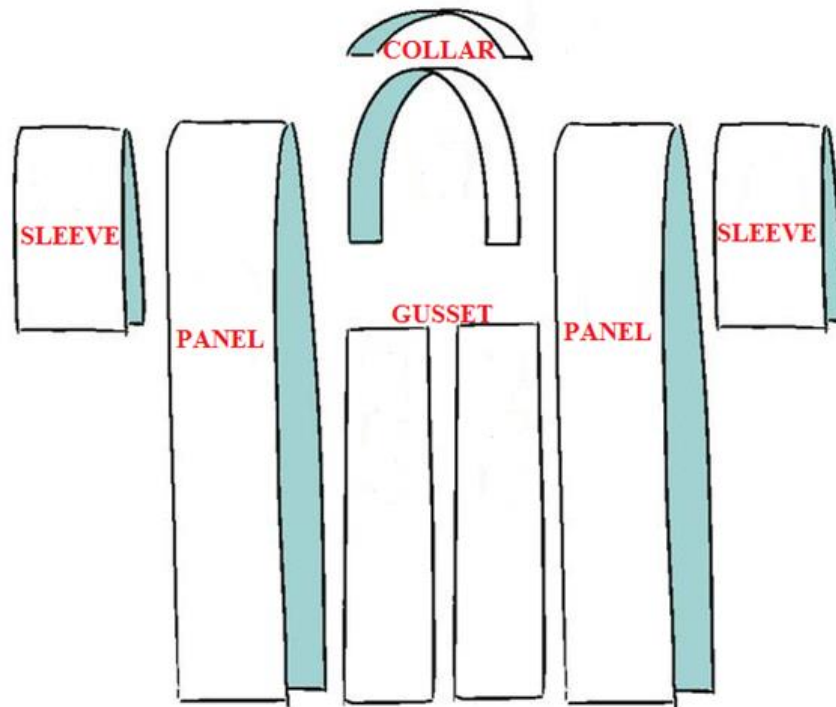
Asian clothing, belong to a category of clothing which is wrapped around the body. The kimono uses no buttons or zippers but is held in place with various belts and a stiff sash called an obi.

Kimono fabric can normally only be purchased in a kimono shop (known as *gofukuya* in Japanese) in the shape of a *tanmono* (bolt of kimono cloth), which is usually between 37 and 40cm wide (although width varies according to when it was made and whether it was intended for a woman or a man) and between 11 and 13 metres long. The bolt is cut into eight pieces and sewn together to form the kimono. The diagram below shows the typical parts of a kimono in a *tanmono*, although some sewing techniques vary.



Kimono Structure



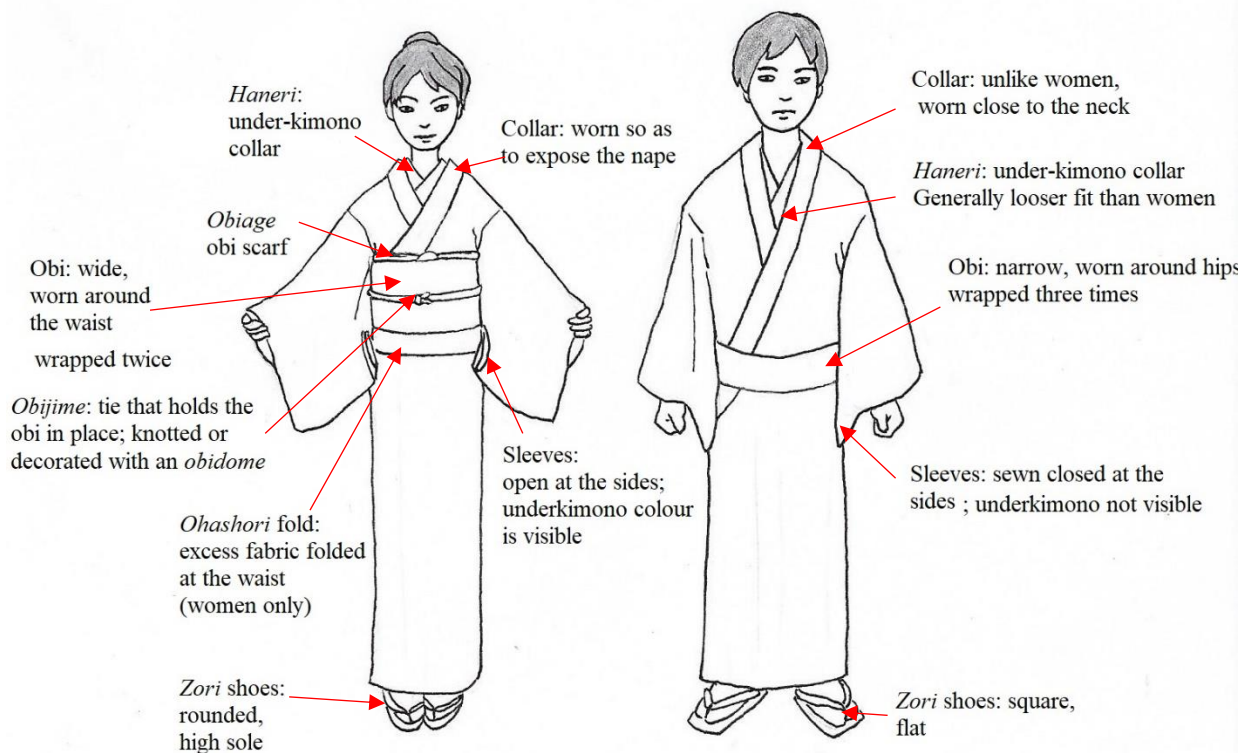


*Gusset: a piece of material sewn into a garment to strengthen or enlarge a part of it.

The word itself, *kimono*, is thought to derive from the expression *kirumono* which means ‘things to wear’ and is only thought to have come into existence during the mid-nineteenth century and the increasing exposure to and influence of Western clothing (Milhaupt 2014: 21, Dalby 2001: 12). Prior to this, Terry Satsuki Milhaupt notes, clothing varied enormously according to class and occupation, as such each type of clothing had its own name (Milhaupt 2014: 21). The kimono in its present form derives from the *kosode*, a kind of undergarment worn in combination with red *hakama* trousers by court nobility in the Heian period regardless of gender (Jackson 2015: 8, Morrison and Price 1997: 10). In the centuries that followed the Heian period, the *kosode* was increasingly lengthened and worn as the outer layer of clothing. The *kosode* became the standard form of clothing for the samurai class women in the Edo Period. The next milestone on the road from *kosode* to *kimono* was the Meiji Restoration in 1868 with the beginning of the Meiji period

(1868-1912). The social classes of samurai, peasant, artisan and merchant were abolished, and increasingly women from all walks of life aspired to the elegant *kosode* of the upper-class women.

The gendered dimension of the kimono was also a product of the later nineteenth and twentieth century. Maynard notes that in many cultures across the world, it generally seems to be men who adopt Western clothing the quickest (Maynard 2004: 5). Japan is no exception, and in the race to ‘catch up’ with the West and become a modern nation with the trappings of Western-style military, national education system, industry and government (Pyle 1996: 92), men were encouraged to wear Western clothes as a sign that Japan was now part of the modern world stage (Koike, Noguchi and Komura 2000: 102). By contrast, women continued to wear Japanese dress well into the 20th century, with the lasting effect that the kimono is now primarily associated with women. A male version exists and is quite similar, although some features are different, as well as the way in which it is worn (Hanley 1997:167). The drawing below illustrates the differences between women and men’s kimono:



Whilst women leave a gap behind the nape of the neck, men do not. Men's obi are longer and narrower than women's, and worn around the hips rather than around the waist. Men also do not have the *ohashori* feature, where a fold of fabric is gathered and folded beneath the obi.

Where does this leave the kimono in the 20th century? The *kosode* now dominates remaining forms of *wafuku*, or Japanese dress, and in the second half of the 20th century, the kimono became increasingly formalised, and increasingly expensive. This is something that many authors writing about the kimono have noted, but they frequently neglect to highlight the important role that the kimono industry had to play in this formalisation. I will explore this in greater detail in Chapter Three, but for now suffice to say that as Japan's economy took off and Japanese people became more affluent, the kimono industry encouraged the formalisation of the kimono and actively produced a set of rules regarding types of kimono and levels of formality, appropriate patterns for season and occasion. Whilst men still had the option to wear (usually a rented) formal kimono and *hakama* trousers for their wedding, it is only relatively recently in the last 5 or 6 years that men have started wearing the kimono again. As such the male form of the kimono, while still subject to certain rules, has not produced as many varieties as the female kimono. The kimono industry and other sources, such as women's magazines, reinforced the idea that the kimono was bound by three key factors: Time, Place and Occasion. These English words are used in an acronym, TPO, to describe clothing which is appropriate for a given situation. There exists in Japan a great deal of literature on how, when and where to wear a kimono. A source I refer to frequently is *Kimono no Jiten: Utsukushii Kikonashi no Rūru (The Kimono Dictionary: Rules for Beautiful Mastery of the Kimono)* which is a dictionary of all things kimono, laying out major dye and weave techniques, types of kimono and advice on when to wear which type, explanations of patterns and family crests as well as guidance on how to care for kimono. Japan is a prolific provider of advice literature to a population eager to do things 'correctly', and there is a large amount of advice literature available on the kimono. Whilst this book is quite a formal guide, there is a plethora of more informal guidance on how to wear the kimono.

Prior to 20th century standardisation, these rules were subject to a lot of variation across region and class, but in the 20th century this became fixed into a set of rules that I shall call the 'kimono canon'. Failing to conform to the canon was considered a major social faux-pas and continues to be considered this way even today. I shall explore this idea of the 'kimono canon' as

a discourse of propriety and etiquette, and particularly the industry's role in its creation, throughout my thesis, but for now it is important to note that it exists. This is because its subtle (and at times not so subtle) pressure dominates in one form or another, the way in which my participants view and understand what the kimono is and what its role in their lives should be.

What form does this 'kimono canon' take? As the expression 'TPO' might suggest, the rules concern kimono type, but also season and age-appropriateness. For the purposes of this introduction, I will briefly explain the way the kimono canon splits kimono types into formal (*reisō* or *yosoiki*) and non-formal (usually known as *fudangi*⁵). Non-formal kimono are an ambiguous category, since they can also contain kimono that are extremely expensive, such as *yuki tsumugi* and *Oshima* pongee. These types of non-formal kimono have their own sub-category, referred to by the word *orimono* (woven) as opposed to *somemono* (dyed) which tend to fall into the formal category. The appropriate obi needs to be matched to the kimono, and there are generally speaking three main types of obi: the *fukuro-obi* (most formal) the *Nagoya-obi* (semi formal) and the *hanhaba* or half-width obi, considered to be casual wear and usually associated with the summer *yukata* (light cotton kimono). TPO also covers seasonal rules. Typically there are 3 seasonal kimono types: lined kimono, which are worn from October to May, unlined kimono, which are worn in September and June, and summer kimono which are worn in July and August. Kimono and obi patterns, particularly with formal kimono, are coded for seasonality. This means that a kimono featuring irises can only be worn in May when irises flower, or an obi with cherry blossom can only be used in February, March and April. As Daniels has noted, rituals of domestic consumption in Japan draw on a sense of aesthetics grounded in seasonality, and that 'seasonal kimono codes change almost monthly with the appearance of new plants and flowers' (Daniels 2009: 174). Mastering these codes became a key aspect of cultural capital for middle-class women in post-war Japan, and used to be a central aspect of 'bridal preparation' for getting married, but since the 1990s, this form of cultural capital and aesthetic judgement has increasingly lost traction in Japan, for reasons that I shall explore in Chapter 2.

In addition there is also the *yukata*, normally made from cotton and typically worn during summer festivals. There has been a rise in popularity in *yukata* wear in the last decade among

⁵ This means 'every day wear' and harks back to when cotton or wool kimono were in fact every day wear. Kimono terminology is difficult to translate into English since there are no direct translations available, and as such I do my best to convey in English the subtle nuances that these words contain.

young people, and there is some suggestion that this popularity has also piqued interest in the kimono. The crucial difference between the *yukata* and the kimono is that the kimono requires an underkimono and the *yukata* is worn directly against the skin. The *yukata* is also worn with the least formal obi, the *hanhaba* or half-width obi, which is also the easiest to tie. Ready-tied obi also exist. *Yukata* are typically much cheaper and much easier to wear than kimono.

This leads me to possibly the most crucial characteristic of the kimono canon. The formalisation of the kimono in the 20th century has made women's kimono very difficult to wear. I will expand on this in the following chapter. The word kimono tends to make people think of an item in the singular, or maybe of the kimono-obi pair for those more familiar, but a kimono outfit is in fact composed of many different items – up to sixteen pieces are needed to achieve the finished look. The complexity of wearing a kimono lies in a) being able or willing to purchase a kimono and all its accoutrements, b) mastering putting it on and c) engaging with the rules of the kimono canon. This complexity is something that I became intimately familiar with. My methodology with my key research participants relied on spending a lot of time with them and learning from them. This was particularly the case with Sachiko Ishikawa (my host mother during my year of study abroad in Nagoya in 2008 and my host once more during my fieldwork) and Kyoko Onoda – two women with contrasting tastes. As they invested time in me, teaching me to wear the kimono, so did I, investing in them and absorbing their techniques and tastes. Keen to convey the complexity of kimono wearing in my thesis, I asked Kyoko if she would be willing for me to photograph her as she put on a kimono. In her inimitable way, she told me she would be happy to, warning me that her technique would involve her looking like a 'boneless ham' halfway through. We started with her kimono, obi and accessories, laid out on her tatami floor ready for her to wear.

Kyoko's kimono and accessories:

1. The kimono itself
2. Obi
3. *Nagajuban* (underkimono)
4. *Haneri* (a decorative collar cover sewn onto the *nagajuban* – sometimes left white)
5. Underwear (choices vary considerably)
6. *Tabi* socks
7. Collar core (plastic or cardboard core used to stiffen the kimono collar)

8. Anywhere between 3 to 5 *himo* (thin belts used to keep kimono and underkimono in place, and to help tie the obi)
10. *Maeita* (a piece of stiff plastic or card wrapped around the waist that helps the obi sit comfortably)
11. *Obimakura* (a padded cushion used to create the most common form of obi tie, known as *otaikomusubi*)
12. *Obiage* (a usually silk patterned cloth used to cover the *obimakura*. Since it is slightly visible, choice of colour is often a subject of great debate)
13. *Obijime* (arguably the most important element: this tie is used to keep the obi in place once it has been tied. Without it, the outfit falls apart)
14. Clips (used temporarily to help keep the obi in place when tying it)
15. *Datejime* (usually two are needed to flatten the area around the waist: one over the underkimono and one over the kimono itself, before tying the obi)⁶



⁶ Additionally, there are also *zori* or *geta* shoes, *obidome* (decorative pieces worn on the *obijime* belt), kimono bags, shawls, overcoats (*haori*) and *netsuke* (decorations that can be slipped into the obi).

Below are a number of photos I took of Kyoko putting on her kimono. She starts with her *bagajuban* (underkimono), then her kimono and finally her obi. Throughout, she has to apply the correct pressure on the fabric to create the gap behind her neck, the fold of fabric at her waist and the correct length of the garment above her feet. The result is a careful tug of war with the fabric which, she admits, is never quite the same every time.









It is probably clear from these photos why Kyoko refers to putting on a kimono as a ‘sport’: the process can in fact be quite tiring. I should note that I have skipped many stages here, for the sake of brevity. When Kyoko modelled her technique for me, I took 162 photos, and there are in fact many more stages than shown here.

In the first half of the 20th century, putting on a kimono was a much more relaxed affair, and not so much attention was paid to creases or folds in the kimono fabric and obi did not need to be straight. This became the norm when the kimono’s role was increasingly restricted to formal wear. The industry encouraged a multiplicity of formal kimono, all of them expensive, which had to be worn *properly*. There was a significant power differential between the kimono industry and the consumer in terms of knowledge: the industry knew the ‘kimono canon’ of Time, Place and Occasion, and as a result they held sway over women’s choices. The knowledge of how to wear the kimono became the domain of *kitsuke* schools in which women had to pay the school to learn how to wear the kimono. This is because, in the increasingly affluent, Westernised lifestyle of the post-war period, women no longer knew how to wear it, and knowledge could no longer be passed on in the household. Knowledge itself became commercialised, and the ‘kimono canon’ became entrenched in social mores as if they had existed for centuries. The kimono undeniably has its own logic: it has to be wrapped around the body and secured in place, and it certainly cannot be slipped on in the same way that a pair of trousers or a skirt can be. This logic was second nature to Japanese people before Western clothes made inroads into Japanese culture. The knowledge of how to wear the kimono was taught in the home, a set of body techniques that were part of day to day life. When Western clothes supplanted the kimono, these body techniques had to be learnt often outside the home in kitsuke schools. Although some women still learn from their mother or grandmothers, transmission of knowledge in the home is not assured. These body techniques for dressing became increasingly rigid and complex to fit the image of the formal kimono. Formalisation increasingly decreed that it had to be worn well. This involved producing a neat, polished look without any creases. The kimono and the obi had to be mastered precisely in order to produce that look, and doing so became an increasingly formidable task for Japanese women. Formalisation is not just a phenomenon in kimono culture but also in other areas of life in Japan as well, as I shall explore in Chapter 2 and 3. Formalisation in the case of kimono involved the development of an aesthetic sense of neatness, smoothness and attempting to achieve ‘perfect’ presentation for ceremonial wear. Below are two photos: one is a picture of the 1934 April edition of the magazine ‘Shufu no Tomo’

(The Housewife's Friend) and on the right the cover of the autumn 2015 edition of 'Utsukushii Kimono' (Beautiful Kimono). The style of the pre-war was far more tolerant of slightly creased and rumpled looks, bunched up *ohashori* and a way of dressing that did not aim to slim the figure. Post-war style has steadily eliminated every crease and smoothed out every line, aiming for an ever more unattainable standard.



The desired kimono figure has evolved quite considerably over the course of the 20th and early 21st centuries. The development of the kimono canon, despite being a 20th century phenomenon, implies a timeless and unchanging sense of aesthetics and taste. I will return to this idea of the kimono canon and how and when it was produced, but also the way in which formalisation swept through Japanese culture more generally in the 20th century, in the next two

chapters. For now I hope to have given you a taste of the sheer complexity of the world of kimono, both in terms of how complicated they are to wear but also the depth and breadth of rules contained within the 'kimono canon'.

3. Situating the research: key debates in the anthropology of Japan and clothing

In this section I demonstrate how my research builds on and develops the key debates in two areas of anthropological research: clothing and Japan. Despite the kimono's high level of recognition throughout the world as a symbol of Japanese culture, relatively little scholarly work exists on the topic, and as such my research fills a gap in anthropological research on clothing and on Japan. I also address how my method of analysis, which combines theory from material and economic anthropology, is unique in approaching the topic of clothing and provides a fresh point of view from which to understand the role of clothing in society.

It can be said that clothing as a topic for research suffers from a strangely negative perception in Western academia, and although anthropologists have always collected objects and material culture, among which clothing was prominent, it took until the second half of the twentieth century for anthropological works focused solely on clothing to appear (Taylor 2002: 194). In *The Fabrics of Culture*, Ronald Schwarz sardonically remarks that 'descriptions of clothing are so rare in some texts of social anthropology [...] that the casual reader might easily conclude that the natives go naked' (Cordwell J. M. and Schwarz, R. A. 1979: 23). Emma Tarlo further notes that the ubiquitous human dilemma of what to wear is one 'which we seldom treat with any degree of intellectual seriousness' (Tarlo 1996: 1). There are two main reasons for this. The first reason is the way in which clothing and 'surfaces' are depreciated in Western scholarship. In *Clothing and Material Culture*, Susanne Küchler and Daniel Miller note that Western anthropologists 'struggle with [...] a very specific Western idea of being, in which the real person, myself, is somehow deep inside me, while my surface is literally superficial, [...] somehow less real and certainly less important' (Küchler and Miller 2005: 3). This in turn has led to clothing being overlooked in anthropological literature as a topic worthy of investigation (Küchler and Were 2005: xix). The second reason is that clothing has been associated in the West not just with superficiality but also with women, consumption and frivolity, and was therefore considered inconsequential in 'serious' scholarship (Entwistle and Wilson 2001: 1). Some progress has been made and by the 1960s scholars began to recognise the way in which dress had previously been overlooked and sought to bring more attention to the topic (Taylor 2002: 194). It is interesting to note, however, that these founding figures of the anthropology of clothing are almost exclusively women. Joanne Eicher has produced

possibly the most extensive publications on dress (see Eicher and Roach 1965 and Eicher 1995 for example). Eicher's definition of dress as a process which involves not just clothing and the act of getting dressed, but 'the whole range of what people do to bodies' including accessories, bathing, dyeing etc., which goes towards making the body appropriate for the social world (Eicher et al 2008: 4), is still the most widely used definition of dress. Other key figures include Annette Weiner, whose theory of the 'inalienable wealth' of Pacific Island textiles is one of the best known theories in anthropology (Weiner 1985), Susanne Küchler whose interests also lie with Pacific Island cloth and clothing (Küchler 2005), Emma Tarlo who has worked on questions related to clothing and identity in India as well as Islamic fashion (Tarlo 1996, 2007, 2010), Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins (Roach-Higgins, Eicher and Johnson 1995), and Karen Tranberg Hansen, who focuses on African dress, more specifically Zambia (Hansen 2003, Hansen and Madison 2013). There has been considerable collaboration between these scholars and many works on dress are co-authored. Their work had a significant impact in carving out a place for clothing as a subfield of anthropology (Taylor 2002: 198).

My research adds another voice against this enduring bias against clothing as a 'light' topic for research. Clothing, it turns out, is anything but light. Throughout my thesis, I will return to the notion that fashion changes and choices are underpinned by vast macro-level social, economic and cultural changes. Clothing is also able to effect socio-economic change, acting as an agent or mediator in social life. My research also aims to solve a debate that has persistently plagued research on clothing. Work on clothing in the 1970s and 1980s is characterised by the idea that clothing is a communication system based on signs that the viewer interprets. Based upon Ferdinand de Saussure's structural linguistics, clothing was largely analysed as the carrier of signs, the bearer of a code to be cracked and analysed (Kawamura 2004: 7). Perhaps the most well-known work on clothing as a sign system is Roland Barthes' *The Fashion System*, in which he characterised clothing as a linguistic code based on three systems: the written garment, the garment represented in images, and the garment itself (Barthes 1983). Since the 2000s, in parallel with the more general shift towards agency and process that now characterises anthropology as a whole (Moore, H.L. and Sanders, T. 2014), anthropologists' work on clothing is now focused on clothing as practice rather than as communication. Hansen points to an increasing engagement with clothing as material culture and a 'preoccupation with agency, practice, and performance that considers the dressed body as both subject in, and object of, dress practice' (Hansen 2004: 369; see Tarlo 2007

and Hansen and Madison 2013 for examples). The publication of *Clothing as Material Culture* also sought to breach the gap between the social and cultural meanings of clothing and the physical, lived experience of the material objects (Küchler and Miller 2005: 1). Webb Keane has argued for an approach to clothing that unifies the semiotic approach to clothes as communicative ‘signs’ replete with social meaning (such as Barthes proposed) whilst simultaneously doing ‘full justice to their materiality’ (Keane in Miller 2005: 182).

My research suggests that none of the theories above are more correct than the other. The kimono is, undeniably, a method of communication. As Liza Dalby writes, ‘without exaggerating, we can say that kimono are coded for messages regarding age, gender, season, formality, and occasion – not to mention wealth and taste’ (Dalby 2001: 7). The patterns and colours of the kimono are meant to be read by the viewer, and being able to read them is itself an indicator of cultural knowledge and cultural capital. The kimono is also an embodied dress practice, and the physical sensations and the interaction between the wearer and the kimono is evidence, as Keane argues, of the connection between materiality and social practices, habits and cues. He gives the example of Javanese dress switching, such as sitting on mats and eating with your hands while in *sembah*⁷, sitting on chairs in offices in business attire and giving an Islamic salam while wearing a sarong (Keane in Miller 2005: 195). This cluster exists with the kimono as well: kimono are easiest to fold on a tatami mat floor since it is smooth and clean. Kimono are also folded rather than hung up, making them easily stored in relatively narrow spaces. Since the kimono also affects the way the wearer feels, walks and moves, based on ideas of what is appropriate for a person wearing a kimono, in Keane’s words it ‘makes possible a different habitus’ (*ibid* 2005: 195). My research, then, is evidence that communicative ability and materiality are fundamentally linked and indeed I would go so far as to suggest that this is invariably the case with clothing. I also draw on the notion of clothing as practice: this will become particularly relevant in chapter 4 and 5 when, drawing on Etienne Wenger’s theory of communities of practice, I examine how members of the kimono fashion network wear the kimono as the lifestyle practice that brings them together as a community. In this way, rather than trying to prove that dress is more about practice than communication or materiality, my research supports an approach which integrates all the elements in the evolution of clothing theory since I take all these elements, communication, embodied practice and material culture, to be dependent on each other.

⁷ An Indonesian greeting in which hands are joined together in front of the body.

Next, my research differs from previous research on clothing through its regional focus. In part due to the legacies key figures in the study of clothing, such as Karen Tranberg Hansen, Joanne Eicher, Susanne Küchler, Annette Weiner, Emma Tarlo and Lucy Norris, Oceania, Africa and India have been the privileged areas for research on clothing. Works on Asia and, particularly, Japan, remain rare. The work that does exist on clothing in Japan tends to focus on Western clothes and fashion. Toby Slade's *Japanese Fashion: A Cultural History* (2009) is a historical and cultural perspective on clothing. Masafumi Monden (2015) has also worked on fashion but takes a different approach, offering insights into the world of Japanese fashion from the perspective of everyday gendered choices. Others such as Tiffany Godoy (2007) and Philomena Keet and Yuri Manabe (2007) take a closer look at subcultures in Japanese fashion. Traditional clothing such as the kimono, which is the most visible remainder of pre-Western clothing culture in Japan today, is rarely centre stage. When academic works do focus on the kimono, they take a cultural and/or historical approach. Liza Dalby's *Kimono: Fashioning Culture* is the most frequently cited text in any Western work dealing with kimono. It is also one of the few full-length books dealing with the topic in English, after Hugo Munsterberg's *The Japanese Kimono* (1996). Dalby's work, much like Munsterberg's work, traces the historical evolution of the kimono from archaeological evidence dating from the Yayoi period (300 BC to AD 300), through the highly codified clothing of the court in the Heian period (794–1185), through the crucial stylistic modification of the kosode, to the encounter with Western clothing after the Meiji Restoration and the momentous shifts that occurred in dress practices since that time. Dalby undeniably provides a very useful overview of the kimono's history and usage, however her book is a complex source to use. Although Dalby is a trained anthropologist who did her PhD fieldwork with geisha, her book is not strictly speaking an anthropological text, but rather a collection of essays, something which she herself is keen to stress (Dalby 2001: 4). Therefore, there are very few quotations or references, and it can be difficult to trace the genesis of ideas beyond the author herself. Nevertheless, Dalby makes some trenchant insights into the place of kimono within modern Japanese society. Her main arguments are that since usage of the kimono has become increasingly restricted and codified, it has gained an increasingly concentrated symbolic value, that of Japanese femininity. I do not think that Dalby is incorrect on this point – the kimono is undeniably linked to ideas about Japaneseness and Japanese identity – but her presentation of the kimono does not allow for any other interpretation. In fact, this understanding of the kimono as possessing powerful gendered and national symbolism has not

gone unnoticed by other anthropologists. Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni's analyses the way women are dressed in *furisode* (long-sleeved kimono) and men are dressed in suits for their coming of age ceremony at age 20 in terms of a binary between women as models of Japaneseness and men as models for action. Accordingly, the act of dressing a woman in kimono symbolically associates her with the canon of gentle, traditional femininity based on the Meiji era (1868-1912) slogan of the *ryōsai kenbo* ('good wife, wise mother'). In contrast, suits symbolically prepare men for a life of action and productivity in the workplace (Goldstein-Gidoni 2001: 352). In this analysis, two sets of binaries are opposed to each other: Women and Japan vs. men and the West. The analysis in both Dalby and Goldstein-Gidoni's works is that the kimono is to be understood in terms of its symbolic representation of gender and nationality.

This choice of analysis is not surprising given the dominant understanding that social and cultural life in Japan is underscored by a type of cultural nationalism which dictates that Japan is culturally unique among the nations of the world. Many academics writing about Japan (Kelly 1991, Goodman and Refsing 1992) have identified that a model of Japanese uniqueness characterises vast swathes of post-war literature, ranging from academia to popular fiction, both in Japan and abroad. In Japan, this preoccupation has led to the creation of a large body of literature called *Nihonjinron*. Roger Goodman defines *Nihonjinron* as follows: 'Nihonjinron literally means 'theories of Japaneseness' and refers to a genre of literature and stream of ideas which suggest that Japan is different from all other societies' (Goodman in Goodman and Refsing 1992: 11). *Nihonjinron* portrays the Japanese as ethnically and culturally homogeneous, as well as harmonious and characterised by a strong respect for hierarchy and authority (Befu 2001). *Nihonjinron* also explicitly defines Japanese identity in opposition to Western (American) identity, while mostly ignoring non-Western countries (Yoshino 1992: 16). Reviewing the trends in the anthropological literature in the early nineties, William Kelly characterises *Nihonjinron* as a 'sprawling controversy', rightly noting that it has been 'hard for anthropologists to break free of the rhetoric of national characterization or to resist the urge to rebut its cruder claims' (Kelly 1991: 397). Many anthropologists have indeed concentrated their efforts on either 'debunking' these theories of uniqueness and homogeneity by exposing the roots of the literature in the efforts to rebuild national identity after the Second World War (Dale 1986) or showing how the elites have disseminated the ideology contained in the literature throughout society (Yoshino 1992), or how *Nihonjinron* as ideology matches up with the everyday practice in the lives of Japanese people

(Goodman and Refsing 1992). The idea that the Japanese are, knowingly or unwittingly, bound up in the exercise of expressing or reinforcing their national identity in their day to day lives comes from several different interpretations. Many academics see in modern Japan the lasting legacy of Japan's rush to modernise after the Meiji Restoration in 1868, particularly the vigour with which ruling elites sought to unify a regionally and socially divided nation into a single body politic (Vlastos 1998, Jansen 2000). They might also point to Japan's defeat in WW2 and subsequent headlong rush into economic success (Pyle 1995). There is a notion that the Japanese are profoundly affected by their country's rapid modernization and prey to a deep anxiety about what it means to be Japanese, preferring to sort out things of Japanese origin and things of Western origin into different conceptual categories.

Again, this is where I take a different approach. I will in this thesis suggest that, based on the participants in my fieldwork, feelings of cultural nationalism with regards to the kimono are actually fairly muted. I would not go so far as to say they are absent, but they seemed in most cases secondary to, say, the shopkeeper's wish to make money or the fashionista's hopes of standing out in the crowd. The allure of interpretations based on cultural nationalism and Nihonjinron theories of uniqueness has proved hard to escape, particularly with regards to 'traditional' culture in Japan. An example of this is Kristin Surak's *Making Tea, Making Japan: Cultural Nationalism in Practice*, in which Surak writes that tea ceremony is 'a symbol of Japan as a modern state and employed to unify a national community' and projects 'Japaneseness in ostensibly banal conditions, continuing to condense and give form to a pregnant vision of the essence of the nation' (Surak 2013: 9). The Mingei Movement (Folk Art Movement) is also analysed largely in terms of cultural nationalism. Yanagi Soetsu founded the Mingei Movement in the 1930s and his works on Japanese pottery in particular contributed to reframing Japanese aesthetics and attitude towards crafts. His resolute focus on objects as beautiful because they were made by ordinary people rather than by high-flying craftsmen and, therefore, as mundane, functional and practical has had long-standing effects on Japanese perceptions of beauty (Marquet 2012). However, others emphasise Yanagi's understanding that *mingei* crafts embodied a unique indigenous Japanese spirit, distinct from and free from the influence of both East Asian and Western art (Brandt 2007: 47). As Dalby and Goldstein-Gidoni's works show, the kimono is also subject to this interpretation. In an article concerned primarily with the design of the kimono, Aarti Kawlra astutely observes that 'sociological and anthropological perspectives on the kimono have largely been concerned with

how, as the dress of the Japanese, the garment has been reinvented and reconstituted since the beginning of the Meiji Period' (Kalwra 2002: 306). She notes this approach fits into an analysis of cultural nationalism in Japan that presupposes a rigid binary of Japanese clothing and Western clothing (Kawlra 2002: 306).

I do not argue that these interpretations based on cultural nationalism and gender roles are necessarily wrong. Japan as a nation does struggle with the legacies of both 19th century and 20th century nationalism and the consequences of undergoing one of the world's speediest economic and social developments. Japan is also undeniably one of the world's most introspective nations and produces enormous quantities of material on the theme of what it means to be Japanese. I would say, however, that these interpretations are only one side of the story. When Goldstein-Gidoni tells us that being wrapped up in the *furisode* for a coming of age ceremony effaces the young woman being dressed in favour of making her represent the idea of 'good wife, wise mother', she also effaces the story of how, say, this young woman might have picked the kimono she no doubt rented from a kimono shop, whether the shop owner encouraged her parents to spend more, whether she argued with her mother over the colour, and whether she discussed that year's colour trends with her friends. Goldstein-Gidoni also effaces the industry behind the *furisode* itself, and this is the central contribution of my research to the fields of clothing and Japan in anthropology: highlighting the fact that the kimono is an *economic object*: it is made, it is sold and it is bought. Simply put, it would not exist if it was not exchanged, and yet this aspect of the kimono has received, to my knowledge, very little attention in scholarship besides mentions in passing. It is thus apparent to me that to fully understand the kimono and its role in contemporary society, it must be considered as an economic object as well as a traditional garment, and this calls for a closer examination of the industries that produce and generate traditional culture such as the kimono.

As an aside which is nonetheless important, in this thesis I have elected to use the word 'traditional' to characterise the kimono retail industry. I acknowledge that this term has been considered problematic in the study of clothing, particularly 'traditional' non-Western dress. Baizermann, Eicher and Cerny point to the way scholars have struggled with terminology to describe traditional dress, using words such as 'non-Western, peasant, folk, primitive, tribal, exotic, regional, national, nonindustrial, and traditional' and adding that 'the meanings that underlie these terms tell as much about the perceptions and attitudes of the Euroamerican who applied them as

about the dress described' (Baizermann, Eicher and Cerny 2008: 126). While struggling with all this terminology and its inherent bias, academics working on traditional dress demonstrate that a binary category of opposition exists between 'Western' clothes on the one hand, and 'ethnic' non-Western clothes on the other, with the former being associated with fashion and industrialisation, and the latter as static, unchanging and beyond the realm of fashion (Eicher 1995: 1-2). But traditional clothing is far from static. As Emma Tarlo writes, 'regional clothing traditions around the world are themselves in a state of flux and have long been caught up in complex histories of colonization, fashion and reform' (Tarlo 2010: 7). I have used the word 'traditional' partially influenced by the Japanese words *dentō* (tradition) and *dentōteki* (traditional), which are often used with regards to the kimono and the industries that produce it. The word 'traditional' is used in Japanese to demarcate the industries that produce items of material culture such as the kimono as separate from the industries that mass-produce goods as part of the modern capitalist industrial world. The word 'traditional' is often considered problematic because it implies an unbroken and unproblematic link to a monolithic past and its culture (Taylor 2002: 201). It is tradition's supposed unbroken link to the past that Hobsbawm and Ranger attacked in their famous work on 'invented traditions'. According to Hobsbawm and Ranger, the 'constant change and innovation of the modern world' is what causes people to 'attempt to structure at least some parts of social life within it as unchanging and unvariant' (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983: 2). The opposition between modern life and tradition, then, is stark: one is change and the other is static. I have taken the view that it is possible to refer to the kimono industry as 'traditional' firstly because this is how it is referred to in Japanese and secondly because it does possess a link to the past in terms of techniques and structure. Much of the structure of the modern kimono industry has its roots in the Edo period (1600-1868) chain of distribution. I will demonstrate throughout this thesis how the kimono retail industry generated a discourse about 'tradition' that deliberately kept the kimono separate from the world of Western clothing and fashion for much of the second half of the 20th century in order to better market and sell their goods. I will demonstrate, however, that in the past decade discourses on fashion and individual self-expression have been also been deliberately applied to the kimono by a small section in the industry that I call the 'kimono fashion network'. This creolisation of discourse about the kimono as fashionable and chic, as a lifestyle, has begun replacing a discourse, itself belonging to the second half of the 20th century, according to which the kimono's main purpose is to be worn for ceremonial or ritual occasions. In Chapters 4 and 5 I will explore how

the kimono has begun to be marketed in much the same way that clothing is marketed throughout the world: as a vehicle for self-expression and a fashionable lifestyle choice. I will explore the hybridisation of the kimono as the bearer of multiple meanings: an aesthetic sense that is influenced by global fashion trends and consumer trends, combined with material qualities that make it a distinctly Japanese type of clothing. Throughout all of these changes, the key agent in the generation of discourses about the kimono is the industry that makes it. I take the view that 'tradition', far from being inimical to change, is adaptable, and that the demarcation between the categories of 'modernity' and 'tradition' within the Japanese context is one which is ambiguous and blurred (Jackson 2015: 165).

Finally, a key aim of this thesis is to combine a material culture approach, which does not lose sight of the kimono as an object with inherent material properties, with theory from economic anthropology. Even though much of contemporary material culture studies are theoretically indebted to consumption and thus are intrinsically linked to economic processes, when it comes to clothing, analyses tend to for the most part to focus on selfhood, identity and belonging. A classic example is Emma Tarlo's work on clothing and identity in India. Taking clothing to be central to people's identities, Tarlo demonstrates the role of clothing in India past and present, first with regards to crafting an Indian national identity in opposition to British colonialism and then with regards to the embroidery techniques in Gujarat, and finally through the rise of 'ethnic chic' style (Tarlo 1996; for other examples of clothing and identity, see Eicher, Roach-Higgins and Johnson 1995, Woodward 2007, Margiotti 2013 among others). Influenced by material culture studies, anthropologists have also begun to zoom in on the material properties of cloth itself (see O'Connor in Küchler and Miller 2005). Some works in the anthropology of clothing deal with the economic workings of the fashion industry, such as Warner Wood's work on Zapotec weavers and their place in the global craft market (Wood 2008) or Lucy Norris's analysis of second-hand clothing in India (Norris 2010). However, analyses which place the material culture of dress and clothing in their economic context as items which are produced, sold and circulated, remain relatively few, perhaps in part due to the cultural approach characteristic of the founding figures of the anthropology of clothing such as Joanne Eicher and Susanne Küchler for example.

In this thesis, I will shine light on how the kimono industry functions as an economic system. Yael Navaro Yashin argues that anthropology has typically sought to conceptualise 'culture' and 'economy' as separate arenas:

Culture has been too often conceptualized as distinct from the domain of commodification. Anthropologists have written numerous ethnographies of the disruption or transformation of 'culture' through the incoming forces of capitalism. Like the concepts of structure and change, products of binarism, the categories of 'culture' and 'economy' too have been pit against each other to overlook their inherency.

Navaro-Yashin in Kandiyoti and Saktanber 2002: 221

The aim of economic anthropology, largely, has been to analyse the manner in which economic life in different contexts can lead to insights into to local cultural contexts (Carrier 2005: 2), a venture which demonstrates that, to a certain extent, culture and economy are still thought of as distinct. Carrier gives the example of how studying exchange gave economic anthropologists an insight into the functioning of kin groups (*ibid*). A second main concern of economic anthropology has been to provide a counterpoint to economics by arguing that economists paid too little attention to cultural contexts (Carrier 2005: 4, Wilk and Cliggett 2007: 4 and Hann and Hart 2011: 7). The central argument here is that culture shapes economic behaviour, thus implying a causal relationship between two areas that are separate. I will examine in detail how the industry itself has been a major factor in shaping and defining kimono culture. My thesis, through the example of the kimono, seeks to demonstrate how traditional clothing is embedded in an economic system which is inextricably involved in the creation of the culture and customs surrounding traditional culture, thereby questioning the salience of 'culture' and 'economy' as distinct categories. I suggest instead that they are inextricably linked and mutually constitutive.

In summary, this thesis aims to join an animated academic debate by confirming that clothing is undeniably a worthy topic for consideration and that greater focus on non-Western clothing in East Asia provides fresh data for this growing area of research. Within the arena of the anthropology of clothing, my research also aims to solve the communication versus materiality debate by suggesting that these facets of clothing are inextricably linked. In addition, I seek to make a contribution to the discipline by paying due attention to the material properties of the kimono without losing sight of the economic system in which it is embedded. In terms of my contribution to Japanese anthropology, in addition to shedding light on an under-studied area of Japanese culture, I suggest that understanding the economic life of an object such as the kimono

allows us to break free from an analysis based on cultural nationalism which remains a very dominant analysis for studies relating to Japanese arts and culture.

4. Thesis overview

In this introductory chapter, I have aimed to give you a flavour of what conducting my research was like, my positionality, the key people I encountered and my relationships with them as well as the evolution of my project and its methodology. It has now been four decades since the ‘reflexive turn’ shook anthropology to its roots, and three decades since James Clifford and George E. Marcus urged anthropologists to recognise the ‘partial truths’ of their ethnographic narratives (Clifford and Marcus 1986). In terms of my own reflections on my experience of fieldwork, I will make no secret of the fact that Aichi prefecture was home to me for a year and that I care deeply about the participants in my research. James Davies highlights that for generations, anthropologists have experienced turbulent emotions at the various stages of their fieldwork: from Evans-Pritchard’s ‘bewilderment and despair’ at the beginning of his fieldwork to Dorinne Kondo’s admission that, by the end of hers, ‘participation to the point of identification led also to a disturbing disorientation, and uncertainty as to which role I was playing’ (Davies in Davies and Spencer 2010: 92; Kondo 1984: 79 quoted from Davies and Spencer 2010: 92). I know I certainly experienced both sets of emotions, and against all advice not to ‘go native’, I most certainly did get lost in the woods, but in a most enjoyable way, one which I am fairly confident was not detrimental to my research. Reflecting on my position as a researcher and my role in representing the experience of my participants as best I could led me to a stylistic choice which structures the entire thesis. I have chosen an ethnography-driven approach in which each chapter begins with an ethnographic vignette in the first person. I have chosen to place myself firmly within the narrative since I have opted to write myself in as the fieldworker perceiving the scenes I have witnessed. I do not believe that a first person narrative detracts from the fact that every research question flows directly from what I observed and from the words of my participants: everything begins with them.

I also make no secret of the fact that, in many ways, I am simply a recipient, and a fairly faulty one at that, of my participants’ knowledge, expertise, life’s experience, but also their fears and hopes and their dreams. I try to do justice in this thesis to the patience and kindness with which they tried to impart their knowledge to me. It is my hope that, in addition to shedding light on the contemporary kimono industry and 21st century kimono culture, this thesis will also enable you to get to know Aichi prefecture (hardly top of the list for tourists both domestic and international) but above all the wonderful characters that I met during my fieldwork, who contributed so much

to me on an intellectual and personal level. To accurately reflect my relationship with them, I have made some slightly unorthodox naming choices in this thesis. In most cases, Japanese names will be first introduced as first name then last name, and after that as last name + san. In certain cases however, I will use first names only, without –san. These special cases are Sachiko Ishikawa and Kyoko Onoda and Takashi Onoda, who will be referred to simply by their first names. This is because these participants have met my family and I have introduced them using first names only. The naming stuck in English, and now for me to refer even in writing to Kyoko as Onoda-san feels untrue to the way I conceive of her. Another exception is Ima Kikuchi, who is known to her readers and followers as Ima-san (first name + san) and I also refer to her by this name. As such, I ask the reader to bear with me on these naming inconsistencies.

Based on the data I have collected from the many people who contributed to my research, in this thesis I set out to resolve a paradox of competing kimono cultures: on the one hand the rigid rules of the ‘kimono canon’ and an industry on the decline, on the other a rising counter-force comprised of both retailers and customers willing to loosen the rules with a discourse about fashion and fun. Throughout my thesis I will return to the role of the industry in shaping both the ‘kimono canon’ of the 20th century *and* in generating a counter-force based on fashion and lifestyle: in other words, the role of the retailers is always a major factor in the generation of kimono culture.

The structure of my thesis reflects the way in which my fieldwork unfolded: from my initial investigation into the *tansu* and kimono collections of women in my neighbourhood to my budding understanding of how the kimono industry works and then on to my fieldwork with those who are carefully negotiating, compromising and even battling to change the industry from within. I make extensive use of pictures in my thesis, in part to compensate for the fact that wearing a kimono is a sensory experience, and since only the visual element can be preserved in this thesis I made the decision to use as many photos as possible to convey the visual qualities of the kimono. There are also many pictures of people in this thesis, and this is designed to better acquaint the reader with the many research participants I met over the course of my fieldwork. I have deliberately chosen not to use captions, and to keep references to the contents of the pictures minimal in the main body of the text. As Douglas Harper writes, ‘the meanings of photos are importantly conditioned by their captions’ (Harper 2003: 262) and I have chosen to let the photos speak for themselves rather than overburden them with explanatory captions.

In Chapter 2, I investigate the socio-economic shifts that brought about the wide-spread custom of buying expensive kimono to fill the trousseau of brides in the second half of the 20th century and the custom of buying expensive *furisode* for young women's *seijinshiki* (coming of age ceremonies) at age 20. I will investigate where the customs of the *tansu* and the *furisode* came from, and how Japan's post-war economic success spurred their spread through all sections of society. I will also investigate the role of the kimono industry in making ever more expensive kimono to suite the appetites of wealthy post-war middle-class families, anchoring the kimono as a 'prestige item' rather than as something to be worn. I will investigate what socio-economic shifts have caused these customs to break down, particularly the economic recession since the 1990s and the changing landscape of marriage in Japan. I will highlight the impact this has had on the kimono industry as a whole.

In Chapter 3, I will investigate how kimono shops work in Japan. I will start by exploring something that piqued my interest from the very start of my fieldwork, which is the antagonistic relationship between kimono retailers and customers. Kimono shop owners have used to their advantage the fact that they control knowledge about the kimono, how it is made and where it is made. As a result, they are in a position of power vis-à-vis their customers. While officially 'guiding' the customer to make the right purchase, many retailers have used the customer's lack of knowledge and the opacity of the industry to mark up prices and in the worst cases simply to lie about where kimono are made and what they are made from.

As a result, kimono shops have acquired a reputation for dishonesty and for being *kowai* (scary). Amidst falling demand, low sales, a rigid system of distribution and a poor reputation, kimono shop owners are forced to strategise in order to keep their heads above water. Using three examples from my fieldwork, Go-Ichi-Maru, Kyorei and Kawahiraya, I will explore how shops that adhere to a traditional model strategise in order to survive. I will also aim to provide an overview of the workings of the kimono industry as a whole, the way in which the chain of distribution is divided into craftspeople, manufacturers (or *makers* as they are known in Japanese), wholesalers and retailers. I will investigate how this chain of distribution is threatened and how it is steadily splintering and disintegrating, allowing independent craftspeople to arise, *makers* to set up their own original brands and how people are bypassing traditional channels by buying directly from craftspeople rather than through retailers and wholesalers. The breakdown of the chain of

distribution may threaten the industry, but the diversification that it allows is changing the nature and the role of the kimono in society.

In Chapter 4, I will explore in detail one shop, Azumaya, which has broken away from the traditional chain of distribution by shunning ordinary distribution channels and promoting the kimono as a fashion item for both women and men rather than a prestige item for women only. In this rather new revisioning of the kimono, the kimono is considered largely in terms of casual wear and is often made of cotton rather than silk and is meant to be worn and enjoyed rather than stored in a *tansu* as a prestige item. Azumaya's owner, Yoshihide Shibakawa, is a trend-setter who takes an active role in designing kimono in collaboration with craftspeople and *makers*. I will explore the way Shibakawa-san employs oppositional discourse with regards to the rest of the kimono industry but also Western clothes and the world of mass consumption. I will also explore how Azumaya is envisioned as the 'home' of a lifestyle community of people who wear the kimono as fashion.

Chapter 5 explores in greater depth this community of practice, knowledge and consumption by examining Azumaya in the context of the 'kimono fashion network' to which the shop belongs. This network of '*nakama*' (allies) comprised of shops owners, writers, independent artists, wholesalers, craftspeople and, of course, customers, came about with the help of Internet and social media. Using the concept of 'community of practice' put forward by Etienne Wenger, I argue that this network is a community of practice united by a shared practice, discourse and a strong sense of belonging. To this concept I add that knowledge, consumption and taste play a key role in bonding the community together. In order to create the boundary lines which define their group, the network operates by inducting members into their own sense of aesthetics and taste by taking a stance with regards to the rules of the established kimono canon. This relationship to the established rules is ambiguous, at once rebellious and anti-establishment in one context, and following the rules to the letter in another. Finally in this chapter I investigate how members of the network are characterised by a thirst for authenticity in the products that they consume which pushes them to understand the material nature of the kimono in great depth and seek out the craftspeople who make their kimono.

In Chapter 6 is the last chapter of this thesis and brings together the different threads and conclusions that I draw from my research. Finally, in the epilogue I explore an event put on by Azumaya and the kimono fashion network in Tokyo in September and October 2016 and I

investigate if this movement is simply a subculture or whether it has the possibility to effect a long-term transformation of the role of the kimono in Japan today.

Chapter 2: Kimono Sleeping in their *Tansu*: the Rise and Fall of the Formal Kimono



December 2015 marked my decision to talk with women in my neighbourhood about their kimono collections but also their kimono dressers, the *tansu*. My host mother Sachiko was instrumental in putting me in touch with participants: she made calls to her friends and neighbours. Many of them were already known to me from the time I have lived in Toyota in 2008-2009 with Sachiko's family. Once contacts were established, participants would often offer to put me in touch with other friends and acquaintances, and so my network grew organically outwards from Sachiko as the initial gatekeeper. It was in this way that I met Katō-san. Hashimoto-sensei, Sachiko's *kitsuke* teacher from the Cultural Foundation *kitsuke* group, introduced me to Katō-san, one of her students, in early December 2015. I took the bus out to a suburb of Toyota, and when I got off the bus a tall friendly woman in her 50s stepped out of her house opposite the bus stop and greeted me, introducing herself as Katō-san. We chatted and waited for Hashimoto-sensei to arrive. When she did, Katō-san ushered us into her house. She was alone in the house that day, her two grown-up children and her husband away. Like most houses in the outskirts of Toyota, Katō-san's house was large, cosily decorated with many of Katō-san's handmade crafts, such as paper flower wreaths. Like many of Toyota's houses, it was a Western-style house, and she showed me into the large Western style room in which she kept two large *tansu*, which her parents had provided for her when she got married.



There are three parts to her *tansu*. The two on the left are for Western clothes, and the one on the right, with drawers, is her kimono *tansu*.



Although Katō-san's *tansu* could be considered modern in style compared to some of the others I have seen, the inside of her kimono *tansu* is made out of *kiri* (paulownia) wood, whose properties are thought to protect kimono from humidity and therefore from mould, to which silk is particularly prone in Japan's humid climate. I had seen *tansu* that were made entirely out of paulownia wood, but Katō-san's, with the external part made from a different type of wood, was more common. I quickly realised that both women were friends in addition to being teacher and student. At ease with each other, they spoke to each other in the plain form of Japanese rather than the polite form, and soon enough I found myself fading into the background and listening to their conversation. The first point of order was what part of Katō-san's large kimono collection they would show me. Katō-san opened up the doors to her *tansu* and pulled out the *kiri* drawers in which her kimono were stored flat, wrapped in a *tatōshi* – a special kimono wrapping paper – again

to protect them from humidity. While humidity is especially bad for silk kimono, moths tended to target the older woollen kimono that most women also had in their collections.

‘Our generation calls kimono *tansu no koyashi*,’ Hashimoto-sensei said.

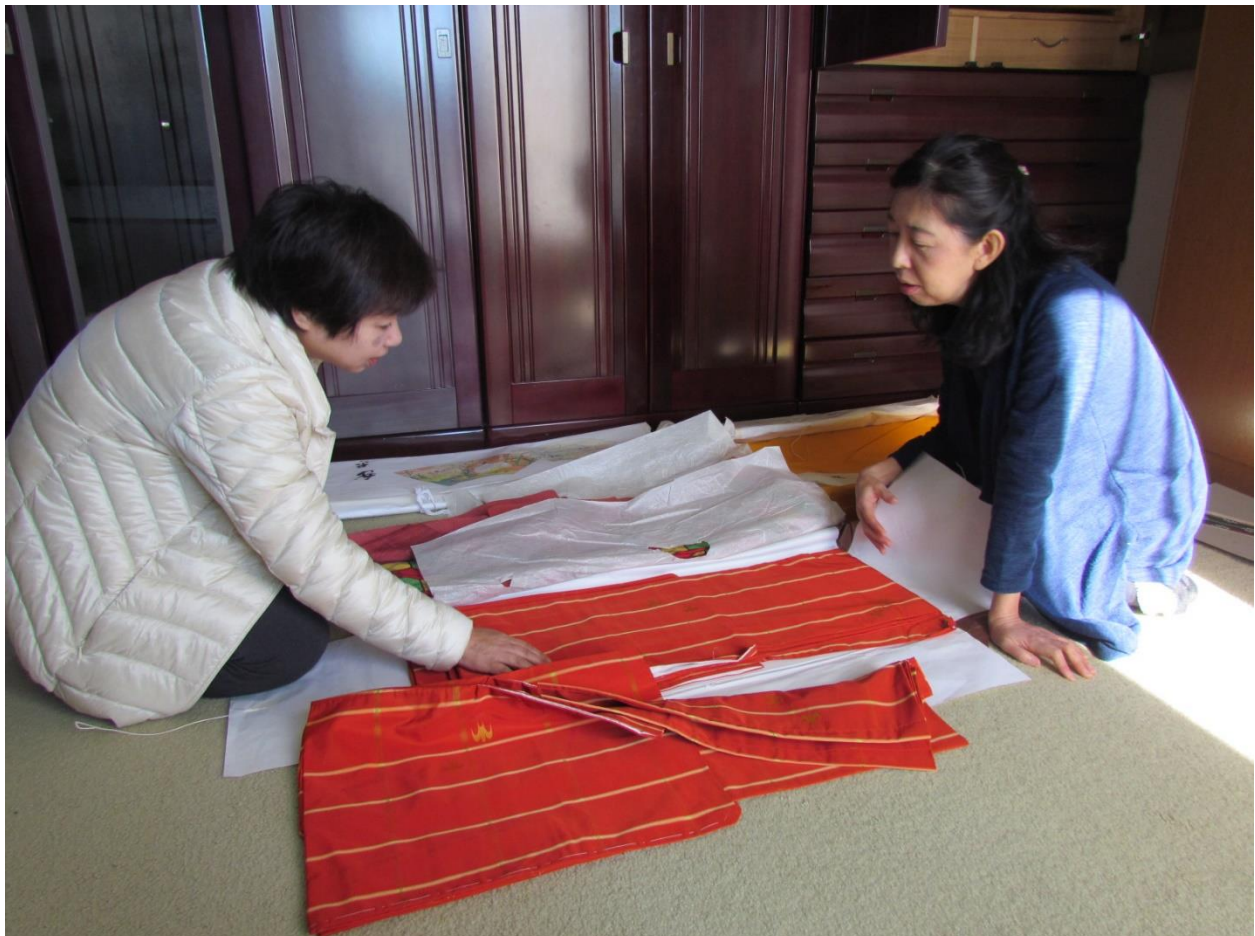
This literally means ‘tansu fertiliser’. Originally fertiliser was used as a metaphor to express women’s wealth in the form of kimono, but now it has a more negative nuance: it means something left untouched, unused in the *tansu*.

‘The first item in your collection would almost always be an ensemble – a kimono and an overcoat, both made from wool. Our parents would have them made for us when we were really young.

‘Don’t you have any wool ensemble to show Julie?’ Hashimoto-sensei asked. Like Katō-san, she was in her 50s.

Katō-san rummaged through the drawers. ‘Well, they might have been devoured by clothes moths but I probably have another one somewhere. Ah here, we go.’

‘That’s right! Ah look at that, wrapped up all nicely.’



‘Ah, well... you know... I don’t really wear them, so I just kind of leave them like that.’

‘You don’t have many opportunities to wear them?’ I asked.

‘Not really. I don’t wear them unless there’s something special on,’ Katō-san answered.

‘Like ceremonies and such,’ Hashimoto-sensei said. ‘You wore one for your daughter’s graduation ceremony didn’t you?’

‘Yes. And then of course I have been learning *kitsuke* with Hashimoto-sensei. I decided to learn because I wanted to dress myself and my daughters, and to get my confidence back. But there’s just so few occasions to wear them, though. And even if you decide to wear them to a restaurant or something then maybe you’ll be the only one there, and, well... it’s a hassle, you know? It’s just easier in Western clothes.’

‘Everyone’s like that,’ Hashimoto-sensei said. ‘And even when people *do* want to wear them for special occasions like weddings, they feel that they need to go to beauty salons and have professional people dress them, they don’t do it themselves because they aren’t confident enough! And then you need money to do that sort of thing, you know? To be dressed professionally and have your hair done and everything. So rather than pay and worry about it all, people would just prefer to wear Western clothes. Also on the day they’re really busy, there are all the preparations to do, so in the end it’s just easier and cheaper to spend money on a Western outfit you feel more relaxed about wearing.’

‘And if it rains on the day, even if you thought you were going to wear a kimono, you’ll give up on it,’ Katō-san added. ‘When I got married, my parents had loads and loads of kimono and obi made ready for me to put in my *oyomeiri dōgu* (bridal trousseau). There’s quite a few that I haven’t worn at all. And now, at my age, wearing pink or orange kimono is just, well... So there are kimono in my closet that are just “sleeping”, ever since I brought them here.’

‘There are kimono that you just can’t wear, because of the colour or the pattern, because they’re not right for your age,’ Hashimoto-sensei added. ‘You leave them in the *tansu* because you think “if I wear that colour people will laugh at me”. But at the same time, your parents made them for you, so you can’t throw them away. It’s unthinkable to sell them to second-hand shops like you would with Western clothes!’

Katō-san rummaged through her drawers. ‘Where are my kimono from when I was young...? Maybe they’re not even here...’ she muttered.

‘Did your parents buy the *tansu* for you when you got married?’ I asked.

‘That’s right. That was what everyone did back then. Your parents bought you a *tansu* and kimono.’

‘People used to think that it wasn’t right for a new bride to buy anything during her first year in her husband’s household,’ Hashimoto-sensei interjected, ‘So her parents would make sure she had everything she needed in her *tansu*. That was a different era. Now women work, so a woman can buy her own things with her own money. Back then, you couldn’t do that.’

Katō-san took out a kimono wrapped in its paper *tatōshi*. She laughed. ‘Look at this “pretty” colour!’ she said sarcastically.

‘Your daughter could wear that. She’s the same height as you, no?’ Hashimoto-sensei asked.

‘Hm, well... Back in the day, I was really slim, so if I tried wearing these now... here, you know...’ She touched her hips and laughed.

‘That’s what I’m saying! Dress your daughter in it then!’

‘I’d like to!’ Katō-san replied. ‘When my daughter has a special ceremony she wants to do, say when she takes her children to the shrine for their *shichi-go-san*⁸ ceremony, I want to be able to dress her in a kimono. That’s the custom, when you go to the shrine. The thing is, I wanted her to have kimono when she got married, just like I did, but she told me “I don’t need them. I don’t wear them.” So I was thinking that I could at least dress her, and that was my main motivation to start again with *kitsuke*. Not so much for me, but for her.’

Hashimoto-sensei had opened a different *tatōshi*. ‘Oh look, the tacking thread is still on this one. You haven’t worn this⁹, have you?’

‘That’s right, I haven’t,’ Katō-san replied. ‘And now I just can’t wear that colour. Even if I use a black obi, it’s just not going to work.’

‘I don’t know, I think you could still wear this. I would, but then I’m much flashier than you!’ Hashimoto-sensei laughed.

‘Hm... it’s so *mottainai*.’

Mottainai means ‘it’s a waste or it’s a shame. This is another expression that I heard very frequently when I listened to women speak about their kimono. It was often used to express sorrow

⁸ *Shichi-go-san* is a ceremony for three- and seven-year-old girls and three- and five-year-old boys, held annually on or around November 15. Children are brought to nearby shrines, often wearing Japanese clothes, to pray for healthy growth and a prosperous future.

⁹ The expression Hashimoto-sensei used – and the one I heard most commonly used in this situation – was *sode wo tōshite inai*, meaning “you haven’t put your hands through the sleeves”.

at the idea that unworn kimono were ‘sleeping’ in their *tansu* (*tansu de nemutte iru*), and other times women used it to express the idea that kimono are a waste of money.

‘If the *tansu* drawers were empty, you couldn’t send your daughter to be a bride. It was a strange time!’ she laughed.

‘We all just wonder what we are going to do with all our kimono that we don’t wear. There are second-hand shops, but, well... It’s all good quality (*ii mono*), and I am attached to them (*omoi ga aru*)...’

‘And when you have a girl,’ Hashimoto-sensei pointed out. ‘You think that maybe you might be able to dress her.’

This was a common hope among other participants as well. Even if they did not wear their own kimono, they hoped that their daughters might accept to be dressed in them.

‘Do your daughters have any interest in the kimono?’ I asked Katō-san.

‘None whatsoever,’ Katō-san said ruefully. ‘Well, for ceremonies and formal occasions they might have some interest. But since they can’t wear it, then they just end up wearing *yōfuku* anyway. If someone was to dress them, then they might consider it.’

‘And after you wear them you have to do the aftercare, too,’ Hashimoto-sensei added. ‘And most people don’t know what to do, they don’t even know how to fold them, either.’

Katō-san opened up two *tatōshi*, revealing yellow and blue formal kimono.

‘I had these made in my 40s because I couldn’t possibly wear all the pink or orange that *tansu* was stuffed with. I couldn’t help but think “mum, couldn’t you have given me some other colours?”’

Both she and Hashimoto-sensei laughed. Hashimoto-sensei’s laugh was one of recognition.

‘When your parents make it for you you’re still young, they just can’t imagine you being older.’

‘And when you’re young *shibui iro* (subtle, toned down colours) don’t suit you so you’re caught no matter what!’

‘They picked everything. I had no idea what had been bought or when. They just gave them to me and said “take these with you”. Even if they had asked me at the time, I wouldn’t have known what to say. I just wasn’t interested at all.’

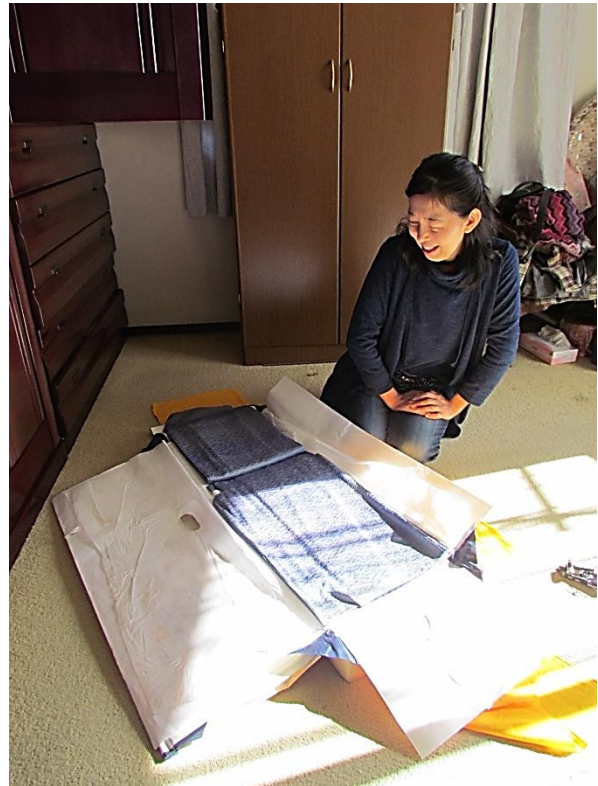
As we started putting things away again, the conversation turned back to the matter of second-hand shops, and Katō-san admitted something to us.

‘Once, just once, I took a kimono to Komehyo (a large chain of second-hand shops, handling not just kimono). A kimono I knew there was no way I would wear. It wasn’t such a good one, but still... I was offered about 500 yen.’

‘The same as buying an offcut, isn’t it?’

‘I couldn’t believe it! I thought “at the very least give me 1000 yen for it!”’

‘Why is that cheap?’ I asked, shocked.



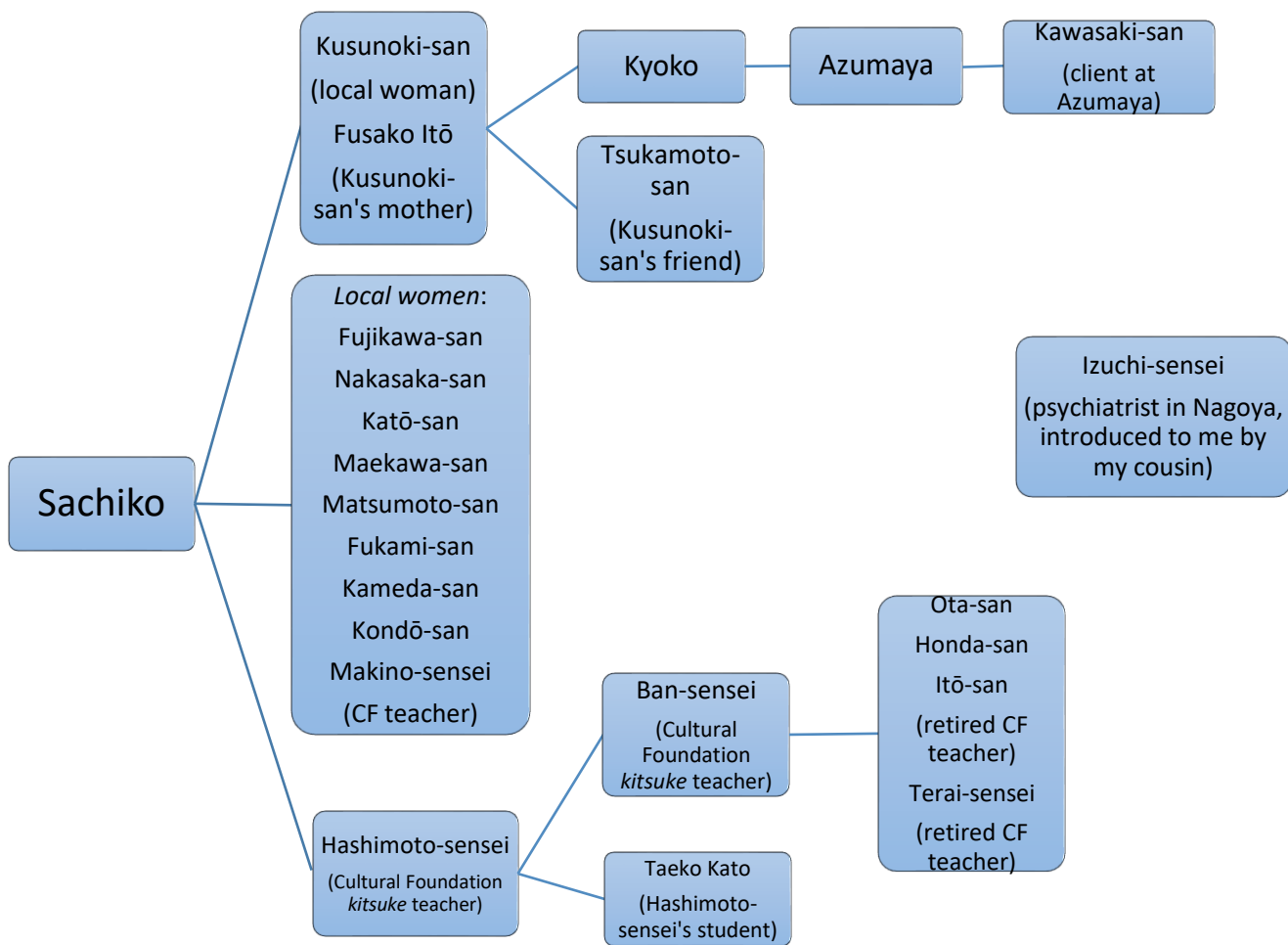
‘We don’t understand either,’ Hashimoto-sensei said. ‘You can’t expect more than 1000 yen, even if it’s good quality. Loads of people just throw away their grandmother’s kimono, but for some people that’s too painful so they go to second-hand kimono shops. Even when we don’t wear them, we think about our parents’ feelings, and it’s unbearable to see how cheap they become.’

‘If you’d bought it for yourself, then maybe you could think that you just don’t need it anymore, but the kimono your parents bought for you, they’re special. You just can’t sell them. The kimono your parents buy for you, they’re somehow special.’

The conversation drifted towards other matters, and as we put the kimono and obi away in their *tatōshi* I got the distinct feeling that we were putting them back to sleep.

1. The sleeping kimono: how and why kimono piled up in Japanese homes

In many ways, the above vignette was one of the most enlightening moments of my fieldwork. Perhaps the most immediately striking feature was the sheer quantities of kimono and obi possessed by the women I interviewed, who were typically in their 50s, 60s and 70s. I conducted twenty-one home visits in my neighbourhood (mostly Toyota city, Nagoya and the Mikawa and Owari areas) during which I asked my participants to show me their kimono. Many of my participants were introduced to me through Sachiko Ishikawa, my host mother with whom I lived for the duration of my fieldwork. The diagram below illustrates how I was introduced to my twenty-two participants:



Regardless of their background and the wealth of their household, and regardless of whether they actually wore them or not, all of my participants possessed large collections of kimono. In the initial stages of my fieldwork, I had no preconceived ideas about the numbers that constituted a typical kimono collection, but I expected the numbers to be relatively low. Katō-san's collection was in fact comparatively modest, and like many women she did not actually count the numbers of kimono and obi that she owned, but I estimated her collection to number about 50 items, including both kimono and obi. Other participants owned almost twice as many, and some owned about three times more.



Oyomeiri-dōgu in Japan typically refer to the goods, particularly clothing, linen, crockery and other household items that the new bride brings with her to her new household (Koizumi 2004: 252). Inge Daniels' work on Japanese homes in the Kansai area in Japan revealed that the majority of middle-aged women in her study possessed *oyomeiri-dōgu* that they brought with them to their new homes (Daniels 2010: 142). A major element of this trousseau is the *tansu* in which the new bride's kimono are stored. The word *tansu* itself can be used to refer to any piece of traditional

Japanese furniture that is used to store household items and the shape of the *tansu* itself is determined by the items it is intended to house (Koizumi 2004: 276). This piece of furniture is thought to have become popular in 18th century (Koizumi 1995: 110). A traditional kimono *tansu* is typically made of three parts that can be taken apart to facilitate transportation. These parts can then be stacked on top of each other. More modern iterations of the *tansu* may not have these features, although they will most certainly have the same types of shallow, wide drawers capable of accommodating kimono.





Kimono are typically stored folded flat and wrapped in paper wrappers made of *washi* (Japanese paper). Whilst *tansu* drawers are quite shallow they can accommodate 2 or 3 kimono, sometimes more if the drawers are deeper. Typically, *tansu* are made from paulownia wood, which possesses several characteristics that make it particularly suitable for use in furniture. Immediately identifiable through its pale yellow colour, paulownia is a very light wood, which makes it easy to transport, but it also protects its contents from humidity (Koizumi 2004: 265-7). In particularly wealthy households, parents would have *tansu* made entirely out of paulownia, but it is also common to see *tansu* made from different types of wood, with paulownia only being used on the inside. Katō-san's *tansu* is an example of this type.

Though the practice of giving *oyomeiri dōgu* may fall broadly into the category of dowry, it should be stressed that in contemporary Japan, women keep the items that they bring with them as opposed to cultures in which the dowry passes to the family of the groom. Koizumi argues that this is a modern adaptation and that in premodern Japan, since the new wife became a part of her husband's household, her *oyomeiri dōgu* became part of his wealth, though she acknowledges that in the event of a divorce she would take her belongings with her (Koizumi 2004: 256). In other parts of the world, it is still customary for the dowry to become the husband's family property. This is the case in parts of Indian society, sometimes with serious consequences for the bride and her family (see Dalmia and Lawrence 2005, Jeyaseelan V., Kumar, Jeyaseelan L., Shankar, Yadav and Bangdiwala 2015). In the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, marriage and alliance was a key focal point of anthropological analysis, and anthropologists took it as understood that in many parts of the world, marriage was initiated by, or accompanied with, an exchange of goods from the groom's family to the bride's (bride price or bride wealth) and/or an exchange of goods from the bride's family to the groom's (a dowry) (Schlegel and Eloul 1988: 291). The main regional focus was Africa and India, and Japan was not ordinarily featured in discussions of marital exchange practices. As I discussed in my overview of anthropological and sociological literature on Japan in my Introduction, the analytical focus on Japan has largely revolved around social structure as based on the *ie* system, but curiously marriage exchange practices are not frequently mentioned in this scholarship. There existed in pre-industrial Japan a form of brideprice called *yuinō*. As Emiko Ochiai writes, 'marriage payment, both as dowry and bridewealth, was not significant in Tokugawa Japan. *Yuinō*, a payment given by the man's family to the women's family in an engagement ceremony, was more symbolic than economic. For this reason, anthropologists

maintain that marriage for compensation or marriage by purchase is not found in Japan. Dowry in Tokugawa Japan¹⁰ [...] was supposed to be used to support the daughter after marriage' (Ochiai in Quah 2015: 125). There was an understanding that *yuinō* would be used to buy the daughter's trousseau, although return gifts of lesser value were also commonly made (Edwards 1989: 156). Nowadays, if *yuinō* is practised at all, it is through a mutual exchange of gifts between families.

The custom that has remained anchored in Japan until the late 20th century is the practice of providing *oyome-iri dōgu*. In the interest of precision, I refer to the practice of *oyome-iri dōgu* as 'bridal trousseau' rather than as a dowry. Though taking place in the same virilocal context and patrilineal societies as the dowry, *oyome-iri dōgu* does not include money paid to the groom's family and since the word dowry often includes this nuance, I prefer to use trousseau in the contemporary Japanese context. The practice of putting together a full kimono trousseau for daughters who were getting married, known as *oyome-iri dōgu* (literally 'items for brides') dates back to the Edo period (1600-1868) and earlier (Francks 2009). Whilst Kazuko Koizumi identifies that some members of the lower classes in Edo period society such as artisans and peasants had started imitating the custom of bridal trousseaus in the Edo period, it remained uncommon (Koizumi 2004: 256). It was not until the beginning of the Taisho era (1912-1926) that the custom became wide-spread enough to be considered a nationwide phenomenon (Koizumi 2004: 258). Whilst it might have been possible to assemble household items and *tansu* for lower income families, kimono, especially silk kimono, was an unaffordable luxury for the majority of the Japanese population before World War Two. It was only after World War Two and Japan's economic success that it became possible for the average family to afford silk. It was during this period that customs that had previously been the remit of the wealthy could be adopted by all classes in Japan. As the role of the kimono became cemented as women's ceremonial wear in the second half of the 20th century, kimono were seen as indispensable for important life events such as weddings, coming of age ceremonies and other events (Dalby 2001, Valk 2017: 3). I have explored elsewhere how the retreat of the kimono from day to day wear allowed it to become increasingly formalised and ritualised, and the relative affluence of the average household up until the 1980s meant that people had money to spend on kimono (Valk 2017). Because kimono were seen as indispensable (if seldom worn) Japanese parents felt compelled to provide them, and because of Japan's new wealth, parents were able to do so on an unprecedented scale. Silk flowed

¹⁰ Also known as Edo period (1600-1868).

into the homes of Japan. Many anthropologists have noted the role that textiles and clothes play in recalling and marking key moments in women's lives. In the context of the Cook Island and *tivaivai* (patchwork quilts), Susanne Kuchler and Andrea Eimke note that '*tivaivai* patterns enable the recall of certain events associated with key moments in women's lives and encode ways of categorizing social relations that unfold in the vicinity of the quilts' (Kuchler and Eimke 2009: 15). A phenomenon similar to Japan's bridal trousseau also exists in India. Lucy Norris notes that in India 'for women, the key moment of acquisition of clothing is the trousseau given to her by her parents, augmented by her new in-laws' and that since marriage marks the point when a woman becomes a 'full social adult' this moment needs to be symbolically marked with new clothing (Norris 2004: 60-61). Mukulika Banerjee and Daniel Miller recount the process of putting together a trousseau in India as follows:

In the years before the potential wedding, a bridal trousseau will be gathered together by mothers (and, increasingly, by daughters themselves). [...] Typically, these unmarried young women would own between ten and forty saris, most of which they kept unworn at their parents' home. They regarded these saris as the core of their potential 'wardrobe', to be supplemented later by saris received as gifts at their wedding. That wardrobe would accompany them throughout their marriage. This was true even for those women who did not intend to wear saris on a day-to-day basis.

Banerjee and Miller 2008: 95

There are many interesting similarities here. First of all, however, it should be noted that the sari maintains a more integral role in everyday life than does the kimono, and unlike the kimono it has not been entirely relegated to ceremonial wear or wear for special occasions. However, the most interesting similarity here is the use of kimono and saris as women's wealth, a source of personal pride and social capital, even if they are not worn. Another interesting similarity is the way in which kimono and saris given by the older generation constitute the 'core' of the women's wardrobe, regardless of whether or not they are worn.

Speaking with Katō-san and my other research participants, I realised that the kimono and obi they received from their parents before they got married (as opposed to the kimono they had bought themselves) constituted the bulk of their collections. The trousseaus themselves were composed of a variety of different kimono as the aim was to make certain that a woman would come to her new household equipped with a lifetime's worth of kimono, both *yosoiki* (formal wear)

and *fudangi* (everyday wear). There is a strict division between formal kimono and *fudangi* and wearing a *fudangi* kimono to a wedding for instance would constitute a significant faux pas. There are in Japan strong emic concepts known as *hare* and *ke* which separate ‘celebratory occasions’ and everyday life. Yoshio Sugimoto explains these emic concepts as follows:

Hare represents situations where formal, ceremonial, and festive sentiments prevail. On these occasions (*hare no hi*), people dress in their best clothes (*haregi*) and eat gala meals (*hare no shokuji*). In contrast, *ke* stands for routine life in which people do things habitually, conventionally and predictably.

Sugimoto 2014: 263

Kimono for formal occasions are made to stand out, usually through the use of lavish patterns, gold or silver thread, and special obi and decorations. The formal kimono became particularly elaborate in the 20th century with the establishment of the modern kimono industry and the generation of the kimono canon and its rules of wear. The classification of formal vs everyday remains very entrenched (see Chapter 3 for greater detail). The reason this was so important is that kimono were worn on ceremonial occasions marking crucial life cycle moments: the presentation of a new baby at a shrine, marriage, death, and other milestones such as school and university graduations, coming of age ceremonies and New Year. Even nowadays, in spite of the kimono’s role as ceremonial wear having waned, 98% of young women wear a *furisode* (long-sleeved kimono) on their coming of age day in January, and many will also wear a kimono and *hakama* combination for their graduation ceremony. As Dalby writes, ‘these kimonoed occasions celebrate the cultural continuity that underlies individual beginnings at endings. They are social ritual, especially as a woman is surrounded by friends also experiencing the same process, wearing the same things. Wearing kimono today combines Japanese pride, traditional sensibility, cultural connectedness, and conspicuous consumption’ (Dalby 2001: 133). This was true of the wearers of kimono who adhered strictly to the kimono canon in the late 1990s when Dalby wrote her book, but as I shall explore in chapters 4 and 5, this is quite different in the case of the kimono fashion network. I would argue that there may be a sense of celebrating Japanese identity on these occasions, but wearing a kimono is also associated with presenting the ‘best’ side of yourself as well as demonstrating proper respect to the other people involved in the ceremonial event you are attending. And in the case of dressing a child for ceremonial occasions, it is a chance to demonstrate *oyagokoro* (parental love) showing that you care strongly about your child. In many

cases, these occasions are rigorously documented with professional photography. For instance, Nakasaka-san, like many of my participants, was keen to celebrate all the life cycle landmarks in her own life and her children's lives. She was adamant that her daughter should have a kimono made to order to celebrate the following landmarks: *shichi-go-san* and *jūsan-mairi*¹¹ in addition to her coming of age ceremonies.

Shichi-go-san



¹¹ *Jūsan-mairi* is a rite of passage that is thought to have originated in Kyoto and is observed in some parts of the Kansai region and central Japan more generally. Girls aged 13 are taken to Shinto shrines and, traditionally, asked to walk down to the shrine and pray on their own. She was forbidden from looking back at her parents as she walked. Since this occasion marked her entry into womanhood, she would wear her first long sleeved kimono (*furisode*) that had been sewn and made as it would be for an adult, but since this would still be too big for her, the fabric would be folded and sewn at the shoulder to keep the sleeves short enough for her. This extra fabric would be let out when she became fully grown.

Coming of age ceremony



Given the significance of the kimono for life cycle events in the 20th century, it is not surprising that parents felt compelled to provide trousseaus for their daughters, and as such this can be considered to be a form of dowry. Jack Goody and J. S. Tambiah argued that a key aspect of dowry practice is ensuring that property could be passed from parents to daughters in kinship systems in which male children ordinarily inherit (Goody and Tambiah 1972: 17). I would add that this is particularly the case in societies such as Japan where women keep their dowries, since families know that the goods would stay in the hands of their daughters. There are two key aspects to the functioning of *oyome-iri dōgu* in Japan. The first is concerned with social status, cultural

and economic capital. The second concerns ensuring the transmission of memory down the female family line.

Firstly, a new bride's *oyome-iri dōgu* was a conspicuous display of wealth and status, both to the groom's family but also the wider community. A key element of the custom of the bridal trousseau is that, as late as the 1980s, it was displayed to the community. As late as the 1980s, it was typical for the bride's family to open their house in order for the neighbourhood to inspect the goods in the bride's trousseau. This would also involve opening the drawers of the kimono *tansu*. When the trousseau was transported to her husband's household, the goods would be transported on trucks in such a way that made the contents evident to anyone watching (Koizumi 2004: 253). Kazuko Koizumi notes that although the custom was very common and spread across the country in the post-war period, there were significant regional differences divided along the lines of East and West: Western Japan, particularly Nagoya, Kyoto and Osaka were renowned for their ostentatious displays of wealth and the sheer number of items contained in the bridal trousseau whereas Eastern Japan, particularly Tokyo, engaged in a more reserved version (Koizumi 2004: 252). Nagoya and the surrounding area has a nationwide reputation for showiness and gaudy tastes, and my participants would often reminisce about how trucks transporting the bride's goods to her new home were transparent so that everyone could see the contents.

As Hashimoto-sensei and Katō-san said in the above vignette, it was a matter of pride for the family to show that they had properly cared for their daughters by providing enough for her materially. This is linked to social status in Japan, particularly in the immediate post-war period and up until the late 1980s. Providing an adequate bridal trousseau advertised the bride's family's economic and cultural clout. This custom can be understood as 'cultural capital' in the sense employed by Pierre Bourdieu, particularly his concept of 'objectified cultural capital' – possessions and objects (Bourdieu 1985). Using the bridal trousseau was a careful and calculated way of matching up the families' economic and social standing. It has been noted by many scholars that 'saving face' and 'losing face' are highly important aspects of social relations in Japan and Asian societies more generally (see Ho 1976, Pharr 1992). Providing a better-than-adequate trousseau that signalled economic wealth, social standing and good taste was key for the bride's family and the bride herself and failing to do so would mean losing face. It was also a way of ensuring that the families were well-matched in terms of socio-economic status. Many of my participants believed that mismatched families, or families whose economic and social standing

are not aligned, were said to be doomed not to get on. It was, in other words, about face and respectability.

Material possessions were a way of securing status. This is a common feature of bridal trousseau across the world. Writing on bridal trousseaus in Central Slovakia, Nicolette Makovicky writes that ‘the trousseau was representative of the economic and social standing of the bride’s family’ and ‘came to represent a woman’s genealogical connection to the property and land of her family’ (Makovicky 2007: 300). In the pre-war period, kimono were a safeguard against hardship since they could be exchanged for rice or food. With Japan’s post-war economic success, the practice spread beyond the upper classes where it originated and spread throughout Japanese society. By the 1980s, it was standard practice to provide daughters with a trousseau with multiple kimono types that could, in total, cost around 10 million yen (around £68,000). By then it was more as a symbol of wealth and a gauge of the bride’s family’s status than as a safeguard against financial hardship. My participants would show me the family crests (*mon*) emblazoned on their *tansu* and dyed into their kimono on the back collar and sleeves. Chiyono Goto, the mother of Takaharu Goto who owns the kimono shops Goto Gofukuya and Go-Ichi-Maru, told me how in the Kansai area (which includes Aichi prefecture) the crest was the woman’s original family’s but that in Kanto the trousseau would feature the groom’s family crest as a sign of respect to his family.

It may seem surprising given that Japan is a patrilineal, patriarchal society, but this conspicuous display of belonging to the bride’s original household is part and parcel of the Kansai trousseau custom.



On a kimono, the *mon* usually shows as white, unless it has been stitched, which according to the kimono canon makes it less formal.

In some cases, the mark of the bride's original household can be very strong indeed, as was the case with Mayumi Izuchi, a psychiatrist in her 60s living in Nagoya. Originally from Kyoto, Izuchi-san brought a lavish trousseau with her. The contents of the trousseau had been entirely dictated by her mother, a woman who by all accounts had a character of note. Herself married to a doctor, Izuchi-san's mother had apparently affectionately referred to her husband as '*yabu-isha*' which translates to 'quack doctor' in English but literally means 'bamboo doctor'. As a result, it pleased her immensely to have most of her own kimono and almost all of her daughter's kimono feature a pattern with bamboo in it, in addition to the *mon* of her family.



Bamboo itself is considered to be an auspicious pattern since the plant itself grows quickly and vigorously and is part of the *shō-chiku-bai* (pine, bamboo, plum) auspicious trio which has its origins in Chinese thought. In addition, Izuchi-sensei's mother had very definite tastes when it

came to types of kimono. Although Kyoto is the home of Kyo-yūzen dye, and most tansu collections would feature at least one kimono of this type, all of Izuchi-san's kimono and obi feature big, bold embroidered patterns. And not just any embroidery either. This type is referred to as *kinkoma* and involves painstakingly stitching thread wrapped tightly in gold or silver leaf, giving the finished product a glittering three-dimensional finish. It also makes the kimono rather heavy. As a result of Izuchi-san's mother having very definite tastes, Izuchi-san brought to Nagoya a huge collection of kimono, almost all of which had embroidered bamboo patterns. The psychiatrist herself recalled having no say whatsoever in the choice of kimono or pattern.



Izuchi-sensei was not alone: almost all my participants in their 50s, 60s and 70s stated that their mothers has chosen their kimono without consulting them. As a result, this meant that the vast majority of their collections were comprised of things that they themselves had not chosen. For many of my participants, the bridal trousseau kimono was often the most extensive part of the kimono collection, and in many ways the most emotionally fraught and loaded part of the

collection. This was because, on the one hand, they felt a sense of indebtedness to their parents who had provided these kimono for them, in many cases spending a lot of money. Goto-sensei, the *okami-san* (female head) of the kimono shop Go-Ichi-Maru, estimated that trousseaus could cost over 10 million yen (over £70,000). My participants would often mention that these kimono were an expression of *oyagokoro* or parental love (literally ‘parent’s heart’). As a result, they experienced a feeling of indebtedness towards their parents for providing these extensive collections in an effort to make sure that they would have kimono to wear for their entire lives. In many cases, mothers would project into the future and have kimono made that, they hoped, would suit their daughters in their middle age and older. On the other hand, however, these kimono could also be a burden. Japanese society was changing in the 1960s and 1970s, when my research participants were growing up. They were the generation that benefited from Japan’s rapid economic growth and they were also the generation that adopted an increasingly Westernised lifestyle, with an insatiable appetite for Western things. I spoke to Atsuko Tanaka, an author in her mid-50s who started wearing the kimono in her 30s and has written multiple books on kimono culture. She recalled her feelings of dislike towards the kimono as a young woman and her preference for Western things:

I hated the kimono. I grew up in a time when Western clothes were at their most fun, their most interesting. There were lots of fashion magazines, and lots of new styles, and it was just far more enjoyable to engross myself in Western clothes and fashion. In contrast, the kimono seemed dull and conservative. I grew up in the 1960s and 1970s when Japan’s economic growth really took off, and it seems to me that traditional things like kimono during that period became almost chemical, and they seemed just, well, cold. They seemed ugly and old-fashioned.

Perhaps not all women felt as strongly as Tanaka-san about the kimono, but for many women of her generation, learning to wear the kimono was not a priority. In fact, the priorities of her generation were considered so alien to their parents that their generation was nicknamed the *shinjinrui* (‘new breed’) (Herbig and Borstorff 1995: 49). More likely to be individualistic, focused on leisure and their own hobbies, and less likely to have tight bonds with their families (Anderson and Wadkins 1992: 146), the *shinjinrui* baffled their families. The *shinjinrui* who grew up in the 1960s and 1970s comprised many of my research participants, and they had very different narratives about the way their lives would unfold, often at odds with their parents. Unlike the

previous generation, women growing up in the 1960s and 70s were not including the kimono as a means of defining who they were and how they fit in in society. They were characterised, as Tanaka-san's example shows, by an insatiable appetite for Western things and lifestyles.

There has been in anthropology a tradition of considering material culture, particularly personal possessions, from the perspective of generating a narrative of self. Igor Kopytoff famously introduced the notion that 'things' possess a 'social life' in the sense that, like people, they possess their own biographical history which can map onto multiple people's lives. Since the 1980s there has been a steady increase in such works in all the social sciences. To name but a few relevant to the current discussion there is Sophie Woodward's work, an ethnography of how women choose the clothes that they wear and how they wear or do not wear them, and in doing so highlights women's understanding of their own bodies in relation to clothing and how they navigate the images of femininity and womanhood circulated in the media (Woodward 2007). Gregson and Beale have focused on the transient nature of clothing by investigating the way in which clothing circulates from one owner to another, particularly in the case of maternity wear (Gregson and Beale 2003). Rachel Hurdley has explored how domestic furniture in the UK lies at the intersection between personal and social life (Hurdley 2006). Such studies on the way in which women relate to clothing and domestic objects have increased since the early 2000s. They frequently draw on Annette Weiner's now well-established notion of 'inalienable possessions' which itself draws on Marcel Mauss' *The Gift* and theory of reciprocity in gift-giving.

Many scholars have pointed out that clothing is intimately linked with the construction of personal self and social, relational identity. Woodward has noted that even in the case of clothing that is kept, rather than worn (something she refers to as 'frozen' or 'dormant' clothing), their role in generating a narrative of self continues. In this case, clothes serve as reminders of who the owner used to be, what roles she might have played and where she wore them. Woodward gives the example of one of her research participants, Mumtaz, a British-Asian woman who has given up wearing her saris in favour of *shalwar kamiz*, but keeps them in the hope that her daughter will wear them: 'both her items of clothing and the former aspect of herself that they embody remain temporarily frozen, their potential reactivation projected into an imagined future (Woodward 2007: 57). As with the kimono, in the imagination of the women who own them, the fact that they are sleeping means that they have the potential to wake up. It is important to hold onto them, as they are potent markets of both the family past and the family future:

The things that really endure, then, that we keep, hold on to and which stay with us, enclaved, to the point of exceeding our lives, are those things that we use to narrate a self and a life. Their keeping works to connote a sense of who we are, of our social identities, but works too as a memory device, constituting a past in things for an imagined future, our and that of the significant others who will live on with our absent presence encoded in these things.

Gregson 2007: 162

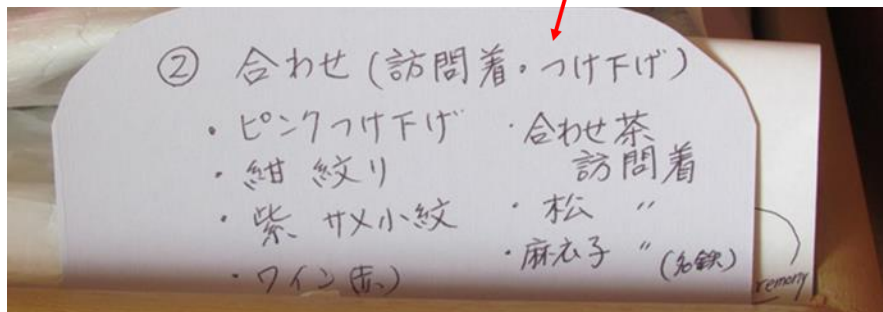
What makes the kimono collections particularly complex is that multiple generations are involved, and their conflicting expectations and emotions reveal distinct generational schisms in modern Japanese society. Maura Banim and Ali Guy have suggested that one of the reasons women in the US keep clothes that they do not wear is because these clothes can maintain a sense of connectedness to the person associated with the item of clothing: a relative, friend or partner (in Guy, Green and Banim 2001: 206). The women in my study were not necessarily able or willing to invest the kimono they were given with a sense of their own identity or narrative of self. However, as they aged, my research participants increasingly felt guilty for leaving their kimono ‘asleep’ in their *tansu*. Katō-san and many other women used the phrase ‘my kimono are slumbering in their *tansu*’ to express their sense of guilt that their kimono were unused. Failing to fulfil the unspoken expectations that they would wear the kimono provided for them began to weigh on their minds.

This brings us to the second function of the bridal trousseau: the kimono within are meant to serve as reminders of the previous generation and designed to keep their memory alive. This is also the case in Makovicky’s study of the trousseau in Slovakia. In this case, her participants used their trousseau of linens as a way of narrating their family history and situating their own identity in a kinship lineage (2007: 299). In the case of Makovicky’s research participants, the associations were primarily positive, but with my participants, the emotions involved were more ambiguous. This very much seems to be the case of my participants: they are bound up in the care of kimono rather than the wearing of kimono, while suffering the double-bind of feeling that they should be wearing them. After having not worn them for a lifetime themselves, Katō-san and Hashimoto-sensei, and almost all of my participants, are now preoccupied with what will become of their kimono. In the case of Kameda-san, featured at the very beginning of my thesis, the emotions

evoked are particularly raw and painful when she looks at her mother's kimono in their *tansu*, so much so that at the time I spoke to her she had yet to decide what to do about her mother's kimono.

It is easy to understand the trousseau in terms of memory and a personal narrative of self, rooted in women's original family, but as Makovicky points out a more subtle element of the bridal trousseau is its orientation towards the future as well (Makovicky 2007: 299). Jean-Sébastien Marcoux has explored how elderly people in Montreal engage in a process of self-ancestralization through a divestment ritual called 'Casser Maison' (breaking house) when they move into a care facility for the elderly. Before moving out of their home into a smaller living space, they decide what to take with them and what to give away. Choosing the right person to give the right object to, Marcoux argues, ensures 'the person's survival in the memory of others' and thus is a way of ancestralizing oneself and being able to transcend one's own mortality (Marcoux 2001: 222). Marcoux draws on a study of inheritance in France by Anne Gotman (1988) which argued that there can be a coercive element to the process of ancestralisation (Gotman in Marcoux 2001: 226).

This is true in the case of Japanese women's collections of kimono as well. As I have discussed, most women have little choice as to the colour, pattern and type of kimono that go into their trousseau. In the ideal biography or life cycle of a kimono, the kimono has a much longer life span than Western clothes since it is understood that it will be worn by at least two generations, maybe more. This is what Janet Finch and Jennifer Mason call 'transgenerational ownership' in their study of inheritance in the UK (Finch and Mason 2000: 20), in other words the idea that an item is owned by multiple generations and not a single person. The women in my study were well aware of this, and they hoped to pass on their collections to their daughters. In many cases, these collections were so large that many of my participants had developed a system of notebooks, labels and tags to keep track of what exactly it was they owned. In many of the homes I visited, women has created a system of labels with their *tansu* so that they could keep track of their collections. Sachiko told me, 'if you don't do it you'll just forget what you've got'. Sachiko herself had devised a system of notebooks in which she had classified her kimono according to types. The photos overleaf are of Mihoko Fukami and her *tansu* drawers, which she had carefully labelled with cards that told her exactly what the contents of each drawer was. Her system relied not just on type but on colour as well.



Drawer 2: Lined kimono; *hōmongi* and *tsukesage* kimono

Pink *tsukesage*

Lined brown *hōmongi*

Dark blue *shibori*

Pine *hōmongi*

Purple *same-komon*

Wine (red)

These describe the contents of the drawer. Fukami-san had classified the drawers, and this one contained *awase* (lined kimono). This is to differentiate them from unlined kimono, which are usually summer kimono. There are formal kimono (*hōmongi* and *tsukesage* kimono). She had further detailed the contents by colour and pattern, so that she can tell the contents at a glance.

Others, such as Honda-san, had tags hanging from the drawers of her *tansu* to consult when she opens her drawers. Some expressed concern that if they were to pass away suddenly then their family members would not be able to make sense of the collection, and as such labelling everything was useful for both the women themselves and their family members. In practice, however, this does not tend to happen. Most of my participants told me that their own daughters did not want bridal trousseaus, and that they were also reluctant to accept inheriting their mothers' collections as well.



The indifference of Katō-san's daughter towards her mother's kimono, and indeed her rejection of her mother's kimono in favour of rental kimono, was a typical pattern among my research participants. Even when a ceremonial occasion called for a kimono, and even when daughters

chose to wear a kimono rather than Western clothes, they would typically perceive their mother's kimono to be dated or unfashionable (in spite of the often held mantra that kimono were not subject to the vagaries of fashion) and would resist their mother's wish for them to wear her own kimono. This was understandably painful for many of my research participants, since they hoped that their daughters would partake in the tradition that kimono should be passed along the female line. The symbolic value of the kimono accrues with the circulation of these kimono from one generation to the next. As Annette Weiner writes,

What makes a possession inalienable is its exclusive and cumulative identity with a particular series of owners through time. Its history is authenticated by fictive or true genealogies, origin myths, sacred ancestors, and gods. In this way, inalienable possessions are transcendent treasures to be guarded against all the exigencies that might force their loss.

Weiner 1992: 33

Another element to Weiner's concept of 'inalienable wealth' is the idea of 'symbolic density':

As cultural constructions, some objects become symbolically dense – so dense with cultural meaning and value that others have difficulty prying these treasures away from their owners. Such density accrues through an object's association with its owner's fame, ancestral histories, secrecy, sacredness, and aesthetic and economic values. Thus objects that are especially dense circulate exceedingly slowly in comparison to less dense ones, which can be exchanged, sold, or traded with impunity.

Weiner 1994: 394

Weiner places objects on a spectrum of inalienability, from inalienable wealth on the one extreme, to commodities on the other. The ideal situation that women hope for is that their kimono will keep their inalienable status down the generations. So even though in many cases these kimono are not worn, they are kept, and women feel compelled to keep them in the hope that these kimono 'wake up' from their slumber. However, it is increasingly the case that these kimono are not being kept. Second-hand kimono shops have spread throughout the country since the 1990s, and the custom of giving kimono-filled bridal trousseaus has become almost non-existent. As Igor Kopytoff notes however, it is possible for inalienable objects to become 'commodified' and be reintroduced into the market.

Whilst there is a ‘yearning for singularization in complex societies’, as Kopytoff puts it (Kopytoff in Appadurai 1986: 80), a drive to carve out arenas of high symbolic value by decommodifying objects, these objects remain at the mercy of social change and remain ‘potential commodities’ (*ibid* 90). More than moving along a spectrum, then, kimono have the potential to change ‘state’. They start out as commodities, of course, but then they move into a state of inalienability. Ideally they are meant to stay that way, but increasingly they are moving back into a commodified, alienable state.

In the next section, I explore how socio-economic changes, particular those affecting family and marriage, have caused the kimono to teeter on the edge between inalienable wealth and being ‘re-commodified’.

2. The end of the bridal trousseau: social and economic change in Japan since the 1990s

In this section, I address the question of why the practice of giving a bridal trousseau came to an end. Women in their 50s and 60s at the time of my research all possess bridal trousseaus with kimono, regardless of the fact that many of them rarely wore kimono. Why is it, then, that the daughters of my research participants were highly likely to reject the legacy of their maternal line in the shape of kimono, *tansu* and bridal trousseau? What were the social and economic shifts that took place in Japan, in the space of one generation, that were enough to all but eliminate this tradition completely?

The reasons behind this rejection of the kimono and the tradition of the *tansu* are both social and economic. First of all, social norms surrounding marriage have changed enormously in the late 20th century and early 21st century. Women grew up in the 1960s and 1970s with the understanding that they would marry *into* a household (*oyome ni iku*), often moving in with their husband's family and parents, particularly if he was an elder son (Hendry 1981). Households in Japan were traditionally referred to as the *ie*, a patrilineal kinship system in which the eldest son takes over the position of family head and the responsibility of perpetuating the *ie* (Fukutake 1982: 25, Sugimoto 2014: 164-165). In the *ie* system, the most important thing is for the family name to be perpetuated. In this context, it was key to provide a bridal trousseau and a *tansu* that was lavish enough to match the social and financial status of the husband's family so that the new bride could join her husband's family without feeling any shame about her family and origins. It was also the case in the 1960s and 70s that, on the wedding day, the neighbourhood and family of the bride and groom could actually open the drawers of the *tansu* and inspect all the other items in the trousseau (including the household items that were usually provided alongside the *tansu*).

This was a way for the bride's family to both anchor their status by showing the neighbourhood their wealth and their ability to 'provide' properly for their daughter, and also to express their sense of parental obligation or devotion towards their daughter. As Katō-san and Hashimoto-sensei also indicated, before World War 2, the *tansu* could also provide a daughter with emergency funds should she need to provide for her new family in place of her husband, or, in worse case scenarios, funds should she need to escape her new family's household and return

to her old family. Chiyono Goto, the Okami-san¹² of the kimono shop Goto Gofukuya and the Go-Ichi-Maru second-hand kimono chain (see Chapter 3) told me that there is also a geographic divide between the types of family crests that families use for their daughters' trousseaus. Formal kimono often carry family crests, one, three or five crests depending on the level of the kimono's formality. In the Kanto area (with Tokyo at its centre), families put the new husband's family crest on their daughter's kimono, but in the Kansai area (a region with the cities of Kyoto and Osaka at its heart) families put their own family crest on their daughters' kimono, thus making a stronger statement about their daughters' identity and family belonging. Regardless of the type of crest however, providing a trousseau was taken for granted.

For women growing up in the 1980s and 1990s, the idea of marrying into an *ie* has considerably weakened. Although the ideal of the housewife remains strong and men are almost always designated as head of the household under Japanese law, women in their 20s and 30s have typically stayed in education longer than their mothers and have typically stronger career aspirations. Japanese people overall are marrying less frequently and, when they do, they marry much later than their mothers (Tokuhiro 2010, Vogel 2013). The reasons behind this trend towards late marriage and the increase in lifetime celibacy are too complex for me to expand on in great depth within the scope of this chapter, but reasons include women's increased involvement in higher education and employment and shifting family structure and marriage norms in late 20th and early 21st century Japan (Retherford, Ogawa and Matsukura 2001: 65). Importantly, evidence in the literature also points to the 'individualisation' of Japanese society, a symptom of which is the almost complete disappearance of arranged marriages (Retherford, Ogawa and Matsukura 2001: 98).

When women do marry, they are likely to move into an apartment with their new spouse rather than into their husband's home with his parents, which means that there is less room for a cumbersome *tansu*, and the community would certainly not be welcome to inspect the contents of the new bride's wardrobe. Marriages have become a considerably more private affair. While it might be premature to say that all characteristics of the *ie* system have vanished completely, it is clear that by the 1990s, Japanese society had moved away from the multi-generational *ie* towards a model of family based on the nuclear family centred around the couple (Kumagai 2008: 12).

¹² This refers to the senior female worker in the shop, and can refer to the owner of the shop, or in cases where the owner is male, the mother, mother-in-law or wife of the owner.

Accordingly, with this shift in social patterns, what is deemed acceptable to wear to important events such as weddings, funerals has changed. It is now perfectly acceptable to wear a dress to a wedding and a black suit to a funeral, and as a result the formal kimono seems less of an obligation and more of an unnecessary complication, particularly when invitations arrive at short notice (Valk 2017). Some of the women in their 50s and 60s that I spoke to felt the need to prepare at least a few kimono for their daughters when they got married, out of a lingering sense of parental obligation, but in most cases these were not the formidable *tansu* laden with dozens of silk kimono that their own mothers prepared for them. As such, it is now very difficult for parents, and particularly mothers, to express their *oyagokoro* (parental love) through providing a *tansu* and a bridal trousseau.

Perhaps the only way in which this sense of expressing *oyagokoro* through buying kimono has endured is through the *furisode* or swinging sleeves kimono. Every year in Japan, young people who turn twenty are celebrated in a coming of age ceremony (*seijin-shiki*) in early January. There is a ceremony presided over by mayors and local officials and the young people are officially welcomed into the world of adulthood, followed by celebrations in the afternoon. Unlike young men who usually wear suits, the vast majority of young women will wear *wafuku* or Japanese dress, more specifically a *furisode* kimono, which is a kimono with long sleeves and typically bright colours and patterns associated with youth and vitality. When the Japanese economy was growing between the 1960s and 1980s and the average Japanese family was relatively affluent, families would purchase a full *furisode* set (kimono, under-kimono, obi and accessories), which could range from 250,000 yen to over one million yen, in other words from £1723 to over £6894 (Valk 2017: 14). Nowadays, most kimono shops provide a rental service for *furisode* and this service is so popular that many kimono shop owners I spoke to said that only about 5% of people actually bought a *furisode* for their daughters. Part of this is because the family often would not know what to do with a *furisode* after it has been worn for a coming of age ceremony, and the likelihood that their daughter would wear it again (in which case they would need to find someone to dress her) is slim. The other part, of course, is that renting a *furisode* is considerably cheaper than buying one, although families can still expect to pay about 200,000 yen (£1382) for a rental *furisode* including obi and associated items. Young women often get up very early, around 4am, to go to a beauty salon and be dressed in their kimono and have their hair and makeup done. Kimono shops

usually work in collaboration with a beauty salon and offer a special price to their customers with hair and makeup included.



The *furisode* is the most formal kimono an unmarried woman can wear. Once she is married (or if she is considered to look too old), the *furisode* with its long sleeves and bold, bright patterns will no longer be considered appropriate. Due to its unique status, the *furisode* is one of the more visible and better studied aspects of the kimono. Based on her fieldwork in kimono shops, Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni argues that the reason men dress in suits and women are dressed in *furisode* for their coming of age ceremonies is to prepare them for their different roles in society: active, professional lives for men, and a life embodied by the Meiji-era adage of ‘good wife and wise mother’ for the women (Goldstein-Gidoni 2001: 352): ‘on the formal occasion that represents their

entry into adult society they should adopt a Japanese appearance. In other words, they are molded into a model of Japaneseness, which is strictly opposed to the model for the rational world of work represented by boys on the same occasion' (*ibid* 2001: 357). It is certainly true that the kimono can and does embody an image of Japanese femininity, but many of my participants spoke of young women's need to fit in with their peers on the occasion, and how their daughters would seek out this year's most popular colours so as to secure a *furisode* with the trendiest colour. As a result, the trends for *furisode*, especially ink-jet printed *furisode* (as opposed to traditionally hand-dyed kimono) tended to move faster than for regular kimono. Goldstein-Gidoni's argument ignores both the choices young women make in terms of *furisode* fashion and the parents' wish to express *oyagokoro* while making a rational choice in terms of convenience and saving money by choosing rental services over an actual purchase. Many of the participants I spoke to in their 60s or older still preferred to buy a *furisode* for their daughters, but it is clear that nowadays rental is overwhelmingly preferred. The sense of *oyagokoro* (parental love) as expressed through the duty kimono peaked and fell with the generation of Japanese people now in their 50s and 60s. I have demonstrated that changing social norms around marriage have all but eliminated the need for a *tansu* and a bridal trousseau, but there was another factor with equally wide-ranging consequences: the economic crisis of the 1990s.



The bubble economy of the 1980s encouraged lavish spending and many well-to-do housewives who pursued tea ceremony, *kitsuke* classes or flower arranging had money to spare on kimono. However, the bubble burst in 1991, dragging down people's income and putting a significant break on consumption practices (Yoshikawa 2001). Secure employment, which had previously been taken for granted, was now much harder to achieve, and the young Japanese generation became more conservative and likely to save money (Francks 2009: 208). The children of the wealthy post-war generation were coming of age at this time, and the economic crisis deeply affected both their social mores and their consumption practices. Whereas their mothers were often housewives who had the freedom to buy lavish kimono and spend on leisure and hobbies, this generation of women is concerned with practicality and thrift. Takie Nagasaka, owner of the shop Kyorei (see Chapter 3), told me that 'now people use their money differently. They would rather use it on school fees or use it to buy a car. It's a *kibishii* (tough) situation. We have a very small profit margin. It's worrying for the future.'

The kimono was becoming less and less of a mandatory item for women, and while the *furisode* remains much more deeply entrenched (even though it is rented), the bridal trousseau has very much declined. Many of my participants had asked their daughters if they wanted kimono trousseaus, to which most reportedly replied that they did not want one. Still, some of my participants bought some kimono for their daughters, but mostly the daughters do not take the kimono with them, preferring to leave the kimono with their mothers, particularly since they are usually even less sure than their mothers about how to wear the kimono. So their mothers keep their daughters' (often unworn) kimono at home, and at the same time their own mothers, now elderly and rarely in need of a kimono, give them their own kimono for them to look after. Other elderly relatives may well do so too. Women in their 50s and 60s may end up being a kind of kimono caretaker, storing the kimono of three or more women in their home. This could mean anywhere between 10 and 300 or more kimono under one roof, depending on lifestyle and wealth. For many women, these kimono are quite simply a burden. Mostly unworn, the kimono take up a lot of space. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, second-hand kimono shops sprung up all over Japan as women all over the country started to sell kimono (Okazaki 2015: 12).

However expensive they might have initially been, a kimono will only sell for about 500 yen (less than £3.5) since they decrease dramatically in value if they have been previously owned, making this a very painful sale indeed. As David Graeber set out in his exploration of 'value' in

anthropological literature, economic value is inextricably entangled with social and symbolic life (Graeber in Carrier 2005: 453). Economic value drains out of the second-hand kimono because it has been displaced from its ‘correct’ social place, which is to be inherited and passed on within a kin group or a suitably chosen non-kin recipient. These kimono, plucked from the world of value in which they are supposed to circulate, have to be reinserted into a new system of value in the second-hand market. Lucy Norris has analysed a similar phenomenon in the context of second-hand saris in India. Norris argues that material and social hierarchies are mutually constitutive in India, and therefore wearing someone else’s clothing is synonymous with lower status, even ritual pollution. As a result, second-hand saris have to be inserted into ‘alternative regimes of value’ in order for them to be safely consumed (Norris 2008: 416). In the case of the kimono, this almost always means a slashed price tag. Loss of economic value is characteristic not just of the second-hand kimono industry, but of the global second-hand clothing industry as well (Hansen 2000, Norris in Alexander and Reno 2012).

The kimono retail industry justified their sometimes shockingly high prices for new kimono (consider the prevalence, still today, of kimono costing 3 million yen – £19,566) by encouraging a kind of heirloom culture around the kimono. Kimono, they reasoned, were to be transmitted down the generations, and so their price tag made sense. I heard this line of reasoning many times during my fieldwork. Because economic value was seen as congruent with symbolic value, my participants disliked the idea of their kimono being sold for a mere 500 or 1000 yen. It was as though the entire symbol of their family heirloom had been denigrated. That being said, it is undeniably the case that many of these kimono are not being worn, and many people are left with the problem of what to do with their kimono and those of their elderly relatives.

Nakamura Kenichi, owner of Tansu-ya, the largest chain of second-hand kimono shops, estimates that there are roughly 800 million kimono and obi ‘sleeping’ (*nemutte iru*) in *tansu* throughout Japan. This may seem like an enormous figure given that these kimono only concern half of Japan’s 127 million people, but considering that some women own more than a hundred kimono and a hundred obi, the approximation might not be far from the mark. He further estimates that 90% of these kimono and obi are ‘sleeping’ in their *tansu* and are completely unused. Although the participants in my study, women in their 50s, 60s and 70s, hope that their kimono are ‘symbolically dense’ and ‘inalienable’, they are in fact one step away from commodification and alienability. This is perhaps a feature of inalienable wealth in large-scale industrialised societies

as opposed to inalienable wealth in small-scale societies in which Weiner originally developed the term. Eric Arnould, Carolyn Folkman Curasi and Linda L. Price applied the concept of ‘inalienable wealth’ to keepsakes in North American households (Arnould, Folkman Curasi and Price in Werner and Bell 2004: 210). The researchers found the principle of inalienability to be much the same as it was in Weiner’s small-scale societies in that their participants believed that some of their possessions were inalienable and had to be passed on to the right person, in most cases a same-gender family member (*ibid* 216). However, the key difference was that inalienable wealth in industrial societies seemed to be characterised by fragility rather than stability and continuity. The researchers’ study revealed ‘notes of anxiety, points of tension, and uncertain futures’ (*ibid* 225). They highlight that inalienable objects can easily lapse into alienability due to changes in family structure, although this point is not elaborated on in depth. What the study hints at are the profound disjunctures that occur between generations and the way these disjunctures affect inalienability. This is corroborated by my findings in this chapter.

3. Beyond the trousseau at home: what does this mean for the industry?

During the phase of my fieldwork in which I was intensively collecting data from people's homes and listening to their anxieties and hopes surrounding their kimono, I started to wonder about the other side of the equation: who had provided these formidable collections of kimono, extravagant to the point of excess? Not the parents of the women I interviewed but the places where their parents had bought the trousseaus, the kimono shops themselves, and the people who made a living from making and selling the kimono. Had these shops played an active role in making bridal trousseaus seem indispensable to the post-war Japanese family and reinforced ideas of *oyagokoro* through their marketing, or had they simply benefited from a social phenomenon that happened to occur in the post-war period? And who were the other actors besides the shops themselves? What of the providers, craftspeople, designers and wholesalers?

The cultural and social phenomenon of the bridal trousseau is deeply intertwined with the economic system in which the kimono has evolved in the 20th century. The industry benefited immensely from the popularity of the bridal trousseau and actively encouraged its spread, along with other types of formal kimono that could be highly priced. They benefited from women's role in the household as full-time housewives and the custodians of the family's ritual and ceremonial life. The Meiji era (1868-1912) adage of *ryōsai kempo* (good wife wise mother) was established as the ideal for women in the 20th century, a role in which nurturance and care of family members is key (Koyama and Gabriel 1994: 31). Its most notable iteration is the *shufu* (housewife) who looks after the house and manages the family budget, and, most importantly, cares for and nurtures her family (Ishii and Jarkey 2002: 36, Traphagan 2003: 127). In this role, it is also women who are the primary guardians of ceremonial life and who monitor the main ritual events of the year. As Daniels writes,

These women are 'moral persons' who manage complex networks of social, material, spiritual, and spatial relationships. They oversee the domestic material culture of luck and are responsible for caring for the ancestors at the Buddhist altar and the family grave. They are also in charge of the cycles of gift exchange that follow each other in quick succession throughout the year

Daniels 2012: 157

The kimono retail industry capitalised on women's investment in their role as the diligent custodians of ritual life. The industry encouraged an ever-increasing diversification of types of kimono and generated new knowledge about these kimono as must-have items. Such kimono include the *tsukesage*, which is a slightly more toned down version of the *hōmongi* but otherwise almost identical, and the *irotonesode*, which is identical to the *kurotonesode* with the exception that the base dye is colour rather than black. Women were concerned to have the 'right' kimono for the correct occasion (such as weddings, funerals, tea ceremonies, etc) but more often than not, they were unsure of what types of kimono they would need, and that is when the industry would step in almost as consultants, purveyors of knowledge about how to be correctly dressed for ritual and ceremonial life in Japan. Kimono are without doubt classifiable as 'inalienable objects' according to Weiner's theory, but what is particularly fascinating in this case is that an entire industry, an economic system in an advanced industrial nation, was involved in the creation and generation of inalienable wealth within the home. Studies of inalienable wealth usually centre on small-scale societies (Weiner 1992) or, within industrial societies on intimate possessions such as family heirlooms (Arnould, Folkman Curasi and Price in Werner and Bell 2004). To my knowledge, few studies include examples of the way in which industries implicate themselves in the generation and creation of inalienable wealth. In the Japanese case, the industry actively marketed kimono as items that would become heirlooms and part of family history.

Kimono, as inalienable wealth, are now making a transition into commodification in the second-hand industry, losing a great deal of economic value in the process. This is because the kimono industry itself encouraged inalienability, tying economic value to the unworn, new kimono which then became the wealth of a single family. That inalienability could not then be transferred to another household. Once a kimono is worn, even just the once, or even if it has never been worn but simply kept at home, its value is slashed. This is a strategy to make sure that new kimono must be bought. What is remarkable in the case of the kimono is the way in which the industry directly involved itself in the creation of inalienable wealth in the family, something which has not previously been examined on the literature about inalienable wealth, which in the case of industrial societies focuses mainly on heirlooms and keepsakes, and is less concerned with the way in which these objects were made and whether the producers themselves are involved in the production of inalienable wealth. My findings, then, suggest that the boundary between an inalienable object and a commodity is even more porous that we might think, given that those involved in the very

production of the kimono, which is of course initially a commodity, were also involved in the creation of inalienable wealth, and thus in this case key actors in the creation of inalienable wealth lie outside the boundaries of the family or clan, who are usually the only key actors in the traditional theory of inalienable wealth.

My findings also show the fragility of inalienable wealth as opposed to its continuity, and how it is by no means a guarantee for smooth transition of family history and identity. As the socio-economic landscape of Japanese society changed, and as kimono became less and less relevant to ritual and ceremonial life, sales of formal kimono plummeted. The vast collections of kimono contained in the *oyomeiri dōgu* undeniably represented an enormous percentage of kimono sales and if the vast majority of households in Japan cease to provide these kimono for their daughters getting married, then it must follow that the industry itself is in peril. And this is, of course, the case. Sankei News reported that, in 2017, sales of kimono for bridal trousseaus had dropped to a tenth of what they were in 1987¹³. According to a white paper produced by the Ministry for Economy, Trade and Industry (METI)'s Committee for the Study on Japanese Dress, overall sales of kimono reached their peak in 1975 with sales reaching 1.8 trillion yen (£11.9 billion). In the 2010s, this figure has dropped to a mere 3 billion yen (£19 million). As a momentous social and cultural transition quietly took place between mothers and daughters in the homes of late 20th century Japan, silently eroding one of Japan's most ostentatious displays of consumption, I suspected that an equally momentous transition had taken place in the industries that provided the kimono to these households. How had they coped with this transition, if indeed they were coping? In the next chapter, I will explore the role that the industry has played in shaping the post-war Japanese kimono and how the manner in which they controlled knowledge about the kimono enabled them to insinuate themselves into ceremonial and ritual life in the Japanese family. Linked to their control of knowledge is their reputation of kimono shops amongst Japanese consumers as 'scary' places in which the staff will do everything they can to coerce the customer into buying a kimono. I will also explore the way in which the industry threatened its own survival by focusing almost exclusively on formal kimono and how the difficulties it has encountered in adapting to the changing socio-economic landscape have placed it in 'survival mode'. Businesses involved in the industry are forced to generate strategies to survive the coming years and, in many cases, are struggling to sell their kimono.

¹³ <http://www.sankei.com/region/news/170708/rgn1707080072-n1.html> (retrieved 23/10/2017).

Chapter 3: Strategise, sell, survive: how retailers negotiate the crisis in the kimono industry



A large modern construct of glass and steel, the venue was not, immediately, what one would associate with kimono. The Toyota Centre for Industry and Culture is, like many places in Toyota, owned by Toyota Motors. It is here that Takie Nagasaka, owner of the kimono shop Kyorei, chose to have her main sales event of the year. Her shop in central Toyota is small, little more than a single room with some office space and storage, and it would be impossible to accommodate an event with more than 20 people there.

The ‘Kimono Festival of Brightness and Colour’ organised by Nagasaka-san took place from the 15th to the 17th January 2016. I was able to take part in the event thanks to my host mother Sachiko, who is a friend and loyal customer of Nagasaka-san’s. Sachiko had asked Nagasaka-san if it would be all right for me to spend a day at the event and help out. Nagasaka-san had agreed, so I came, decked out in what was at the time the only kimono I owned, a polyester kimono I had

had made when I lived in Japan in previous years. I was in an interesting position – while I was nominally ‘helping out’, Nagasaka-san also knew that I was interested in how the kimono industry worked, and since I was never actually asked to do all that much, I was free to observe as I pleased. This situation happened quite frequently during my fieldwork, and not just with Nagasaka-san.

There were two main events going on simultaneously. The first was the ‘Furisode Festival’ aimed at the young women who were to turn twenty in 2017 and their parents. Twenty is the age of majority in Japan and is marked by a coming of age ceremony in early January, in which young people, almost without exception, take part. The quasi-totality of young women wear *furisode*¹⁴ at this occasion. Many families try to book a rental *furisode* a year in advance of the coming of age ceremony, which is normal. This event was a chance for them to secure early rental bookings. There was also, advertised quite discreetly, a sale of *furisode* that had been used for rental. The price was set at 10,000 yen (£71), with a line reassuring the customers that it ‘is still in condition to be used for rental’.

The second event was an amalgamation of different events – there was a special sale on formal kimono, such as *hōmongi* and *tsukesage* and less formal kimono such as *komon* and *tsumugi*. Also on sale were various *komono* (kimono-related accessories) such as bags, clips, underwear and kimono hangers, but also little trinkets, pouches and cloth with colourful Japanese patterns. There were also two special ‘demonstrations’ under the umbrella of the second event: Nagasaka-san had invited a *sagara* (chenille) embroidery craftsman and a *zori* (kimono shoe) craftsman. Both craftsmen were present throughout the three days of the event, and the wares belonging to each were on sale throughout.

I could see that Nagasaka-san had tried to bring together as many things as possible so as not to have to rent a space several times for separate events. The fact was that both events were aimed at totally different clientele and reflected the different customer bases that kept Kyorei going. In fact, there was such a distinction between the two clienteles that it was evident in the spatial layout of the hall itself.

¹⁴ The *furisode* is a long-sleeved, bright-patterned and colourful kimono that is worn by young, unmarried women.



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There was a partition drawn down the middle of the hall where the Festival took place, with the *furisode* rental bookings on one side and everything else on the other. The *furisode* side attracted almost exclusively parents and their daughters, and the rental fees ranged between 200,000 (¥1433) and 300,000 yen (¥2150). Over the course of the day many families arrived, and I was surprised to see that fathers were accompanying their wives and daughters, watching closely as Kyorei's black-clad assistants helped their daughters into the bright *furisode*.

The other side of the room would attract the older clients, women in their 50s, 60s and 70s who associated kimono with genteel femininity, formal wear and pursuits in the traditional arts such as tea ceremony and flower arranging, which would be very familiar to older women, predominantly in the well-to-do suburbs of Toyota. These kimono, particularly the very formal *hōmongi*, would fetch anywhere up to 3 million yen (¥21,501). These women would also be the ones interested in bargain prices that the kimono bolts were going for. A key difference between the 'sides' of the room was that the *furisode* were already made up, whereas on the other side the



kimono were still *tanmono* (kimono cloth bolts) that would be measured and made to fit the customer¹⁵. These clients would also be the ones interested in buying accessories and bags.

If I had to pinpoint one kimono as the diagnostic element that was specifically for this generation of women, it was the mourning kimono. Entirely black, with all black accessories, the mourning kimono is now essentially only used by women over 50, and even then its use is increasingly rare. Kyorei however offered not just the mourning kimono but its summer and winter versions too. Technically summer kimono, worn in July and August, are made of silk gauze rather than ordinary silk. The lighter fabric makes the heat more bearable, but it is now also considered good etiquette. For women to whom the kimono canon was a matter of presenting themselves to others in the most proper manner they could, a funeral in July or August could only be attended in a black silk gauze kimono.

¹⁵ Bespoke is standard practice in the kimono industry. There is still relatively little prêt-à-porter aside from the rental industry.

お誂えお仕立て付 最高級喪服

お誂えお仕立て付

夏 3点セット	冬 3点セット
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 絹喪服 ● 絹長襦袢 ● 黒共名古屋帯 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 喪服 ● 長襦袢 ● 黒共名古屋帯
148,000円	168,000円

※袴下にお名前が入ります。納期/商品と寸法を揃えてから1ヶ月

High quality mourning kimono - tailoring included in the price

Summer mourning wear: 148,000 yen (£976)

3 items included: *ro* (gauze-type fabric) black kimono; *ro nagajuban* (under-kimono); black mourning *nagoya-obi*

Winter mourning wear: 168,000 yen (£1108)

3 items included: black kimono, *nagajuban*, black mourning *nagoya-obi*

*Your name will be stitched into the collar. Orders will be completed one month after measurements are taken

These might seem like outrageous price tags, but in other shops it is quite possible to pay the same amount of money, roughly £1000 or so, for the kimono alone. In that sense, it is still a bargain, if quite an expensive one.

As is clear from the pictures, the *furisode* side was well-frequented, and the ‘formal’ kimono side with the craftsmen and the accessories far less so. Few people actually came to buy the really expensive kimono. Kyorei’s sales strategy became apparent in the spatial layout of the event. It appeared to be an attempt to kill two birds with one stone: bring in customers interested in renting a *furisode* for their daughter’s coming of age ceremony in 2017 and attract the older, loyal customers Kyorei relied on to make the more lucrative sales. It did not necessarily matter if there were not that many of them if they were to buy something costing 600,000 or 700,000 yen.

These were customers like Sachiko and her friends, who felt a sense of obligation to at least come to the event. These women would know at least some of the types of kimono that exist, and they would be interested in seeing the techniques that are employed for certain types of kimono. The rarer the better, as was the case with the *sagara* (chenille) embroidery.

I got an insight into Sachiko's role as I spent time at the event. Sachiko came on all three days of the event, and on the days I wasn't 'helping out' I came along too. She brought two of her friends to the event, one of whom bought an obi and the other bought a kimono. Both chose the craftsman's *sagara* (chenille) embroidery. The craftsman had his tools out so that his client could try the embroidery for themselves. When she tried it out (see below), the embroidery won Sachiko's esteem immediately: 'I have a *sagara* kimono at home, but it's nowhere near as good as this.'



Sachiko (in grey in the picture) encouraged her friends because she herself was convinced of the quality of the products, and also because she trusts Nagasaka-san as a shop owner. She

herself has a rule that she no longer buys kimono ('I have too many already!') but she clearly enjoys helping (or enabling) her friends to buy them. Her friends, in turn, appear to trust her judgment. Sachiko has both a magnetic personality and a forceful nature – she doesn't tend to be easily duped, she says what is on her mind and she is always out to get a good deal. Many of her friends rely on her to give them advice and help in many other walks of life, and if something has earned her approval, they tend to accept her judgement. In both of her friends' cases, Sachiko's approval of the product and, possibly more importantly, that she thought the bargain was a genuine one, seemed to be what clinched the deal.

The arrangement for Nagasaka-san is excellent. I found out that Sachiko facilitates relations with clients, many of whom she introduced to Kyorei. While customers felt safer relying on Sachiko's eye for quality and value for money as well as her straight-talking no-nonsense attitude, Nagasaka-san has also called on Sachiko to help her with some clients. Nagasaka-san has, in the past, paid for Sachiko to come with her to events in Tokyo. She also calls on Sachiko to come to her shop when a tricky, easily offended customer is going to call. Sachiko, it seems, is as much a source of reassurance to the customers as to the staff in Kyorei. Her loyalty comes not just from her friendship with Nagasaka-san, but from her own sense of having been given a good deal when she bought her daughters' *furisode* from Kyorei. Looking after valued clients in this way, knocking off a little from the price for them, cultivating a relationship with them, and even drawing them into the business of the shop, is one of the ways in which kimono shops are able to survive difficult economic times.

During the event Nagasaka-san herself spent most of her time in the *furisode* section, and the handling of clients in the formal section seemed largely delegated to a team composed of a representative from the *tonya*¹⁶ and the *kitsuke*¹⁷ professionals. The former would try to convince the potential customer of the value and quality of the product while the latter would wrap the bolt around the potential customer and chime in with her opinion as both a professional and a kimono wearer (these women, unlike the staff of the shops, always wear kimono – not to wear them would reduce their credibility). When Sachiko was there, she greatly facilitated these transactions.

During one of the times when there were no customers in the formal section, I started talking with the representative from the *tonya*. The conversation quickly turned to how hard things

¹⁶ *Tonya* are wholesalers, in this case those who had brought their wares to Kyorei's event.

¹⁷ Kimono dressing.

were for the industry, and how sad it was that the craftspeople had no one to take over their businesses after them. He talked about the importance of explaining things properly to people.

‘Customers don’t know about the kimono, so they don’t know the value of things. They don’t know why things are as expensive as they are. But there’s a reason! It’s hard for the craftspeople to make a living, you know. And craftsmen, they need us *tonya*. They don’t know how to talk to customers. They don’t know how to sell. And well, when you sell things, you have to lie a bit too, you know?’

There were two prices on the tags at the event. One was supposedly the reference price, which was very high. The second was the ‘special’ cheap price for the event. The customers were left to compare and deduce that they were getting a bargain. However, there is no way of knowing what exactly the reference price is, since kimono do not have a fixed price system, but can be priced at the vendor’s discretion.

In fact, a lot of Kyorei’s sales techniques, and those of kimono shops and all businesses almost universally, involves giving clients a sense that they are getting a good deal. In the kimono industry, however, the prices are discretionary, which means that the customer cannot be entirely sure whether or not the reference price accurately reflects the value of the object. As such, they rely on the good faith of the retailer or the trusted opinion of friends such as Sachiko. Buying a kimono is fraught with anxiety given the sums involved and the idea that kimono shops are not to be trusted. This is why trust was such a key part of Kyorei’s marketing strategy: without that trust, that sense that Nagasaka-san was out for her clients to get a good deal, the shop would doubtless flounder.

In the end, I am not entirely sure whether putting on the event was worth the time and money for Nagasaka-san. The *furisode* side was always full, but the other side was often empty. A few sales were made there, some facilitated by people like Sachiko, but there were still a great many wares left at the end of the last day.

On a different occasion, I sat down with Nagasaka-san to talk with her about her business. Kyorei itself is about a hundred years old, and originally belonged to Nagasaka-san’s husband’s family. Her husband’s cousin ran the business before she took it over. As it turned out, her husband had no wish to run the business himself. For about 35 years she ran the business on her husband’s cousin’s behalf until eventually becoming independent and running it for herself.

‘A lot has changed in the last few years,’ she told me. ‘People used to order their kimono through a big order book. Now we don’t do that anymore. There’s lots we don’t do anymore. About 5 years ago I stopped offering services to re-dye kimono. We used to do *kitsuke* lessons, but we stopped that too. We used to organise kimono-wearing parties, but we stopped 8 years ago when people stopped coming. We still do ‘aftercare’ though. We remake kimono so that they fit another person.’ She smiled. ‘I really like that cycle, from grandmother to mother to daughter. I want to keep that cycle going. But now, mothers don’t know how to look after a kimono. People used to buy loads of kimono, but now they use their money differently. They would rather use it on school fees or to buy a car. It’s a *kibishii* (tough) situation. We have a very small profit margin. It’s worrying for the future. The people who buy kimono do so because they like them, but they don’t have the opportunity to wear them. They might only wear them once. Thirty-five years ago, people would have at least ten or so kimono made for their daughters by the time they got married. Now, people don’t have them made at all. Women in their 50s often want to have kimono made for their daughters, but women in their 30s and 40s don’t want that anymore. So now, people are losing the sense that the kimono is something that you buy. They think of it as something that you rent. They come asking specifically for rental now. Obviously I would like them to buy kimono but, well...20 years ago after the bubble burst, the *tonya* went broke. They overbought kimono and that upset their cash flow. First the *tonya* went broke and then the privately owned shops, one after the other. There used to be a *tonya-gai* (district with many *tonya*) in Nagoya called Chodamachi. Now, it’s all closed down. The number of *tonya* has decreased by half in Kyoto, I think, but I still have to go through the *tonya*. Craftspeople don’t know how to sell things.’

The picture painted by Kyorei’s Nagasaka-san and her efforts to attract customers with bargains and events was one of a business just about hanging on. Even though it was not what she wanted, Nagasaka-san had involved herself in the rental industry, and she had stopped offering many of the services that Kyorei previously offered. Her shop is by no means an exception: many of Japan’s kimono shops are now in the business of survival, finding strategies that will help them keep going just a little longer. But how did it come to be this way?

1. ‘Scary’ kimono shops: how Japanese people view the kimono industry

In the previous chapter, I discussed how social change has affected the role of the kimono in the Japanese family and how kimono are now no longer considered essential for formal occasions such as weddings and graduation ceremonies, but also very importantly no longer provided as part of a bridal trousseau, thus cutting out much of the industry’s market for formal kimono. This resulted in a spectacular drop in sales, many wholesalers, craftspeople and shops closing down, and the scale and market size of the industry shrinking dramatically.

But there is another key factor to the crisis experienced by the industry, and that factor is the lack of trust displayed by their customers. I will first talk about how middle-aged women ranging in age from their 50s to their 80s view the industry. These women are prime kimono customers, and usually the target market for expensive formal wear (Itō and Yajima 2016: 48). A survey conducted in 2015 by METI asked the question ‘have you experienced buying your own kimono?’ found that 41% of women aged 50 and over answered yes, compared to 18.8% of women in their 20s (METI 2015: 13). As the custodians of family ritual life (see Chapter 2), these are the women who are the most likely to buy expensive ceremonial kimono in the 300,000 to 500,000 yen (£1320-£3301) range for themselves and their loved ones. They are also the most likely to be involved in traditional arts and pursuits, such as tea ceremony, that call for a kimono. They are also the most likely to want a kimono that comes from a prestigious *sanchi* (producing region) such as Oshima.

In spite of being the target market and therefore, one might think, entitled to good treatment in the shops courting their custom, these women acted in quite apprehensive ways towards kimono shops. In Kyorei’s Festival, I observed that women preferred to go to shops in groups. The women who came to the Festival, many of whom were my participants in Chapter 2, relied on Sachiko to ‘defend’ them from attempts at making them buy kimono. This happened even in cases where the owner, like Kyorei’s Nagasaka-san, was known to the customers. This kind of pack behaviour was something I observed on multiple occasions during my fieldwork. Rarely did anyone attempt going to a kimono shop without adequate back-up. It is true that kimono shops are typically quite daunting places: whether in department stores or as standalone shops, they give off an aura of cool opulence and a slightly forbidding atmosphere. While some department stores have opted for a more ‘browsable’ option that customers can come in and out of the same way they would Western

clothes shops, these spaces remain daunting for Japanese customers. I was given my first insight into this phenomenon when I lived in Kanazawa in 2013, a year before the start of my DPhil. My then kitsuke teacher, who belonged to the Cultural Foundation, took me to a kimono shop for me to order my very first bespoke kimono. The teacher had selected a handful of bolts beforehand that fitted into my budget of 40,000 yen (£256). She gave me careful instructions before we entered the shop: ‘do not touch anything. And even if you don’t buy a kimono today, you have to buy something, no matter how small it is.’ I followed her instructions, with some trepidation, and I did buy a kimono: a pale purple polyester affair which was tailored to be much longer than I really needed it to be. This was something I would only understand later in my fieldwork, when I purchased kimono that were better tailored. The tailoring in Azumaya in particular gave me an idea of what a good fit means in terms of a kimono. One could argue that my being foreign gave me a zero baseline of knowledge about the kimono and thus I was disadvantaged in terms of knowing what to expect and how to assess good quality bolts and good quality work in tailoring. The truth is that levels of knowledge do not tend to differ greatly between my level of knowledge before my fieldwork in 2013 and regular Japanese people, since very few Japanese people have much knowledge about how the kimono is made, tailored and sold. I have met many Japanese people who are totally unaccustomed to the terminology used in reference to kimono, such as ‘*ohashori*’ (the fabric fold that women have to make at the waist when they wear a kimono). It is as though the kimono and its characteristics and customs belonged to a totally different world on the fringes of Japanese society.

There are several reasons why kimono shops, known as *gofukuya* in Japanese¹⁸, are considered ‘scary’ places by Japanese customers. The first is, as I have hinted, the sheer unfamiliarity, since kimono shops are so unfamiliar to most Japanese people and vastly different from a shopping experience in a Western clothes shop. Even Japanese women who are well-versed in traditional culture such as tea ceremony and flower arranging, are not entirely sure how kimono are made and why they are sold the way they are. A typical shop does not sell kimono as such.

¹⁸ 呉服屋 is comprised of the characters 呉 (*go*) which refers to Wu, a kingdom in ancient China, 服 (*fuku*) which means ‘clothing’, and 屋 (*ya*) which means ‘shop’. The kimono industry in Japanese does not use the word ‘kimono’. 呉服 (*gofuku*), which means ‘clothes from the land of Wu’. The origin of much of Japanese civilisation, including clothing, is Chinese. Even now, kimono shops are referred to as 呉服屋 (*gofukuya*) or 呉服店 (*gofukuten*) (Tanaka 2012: 82).

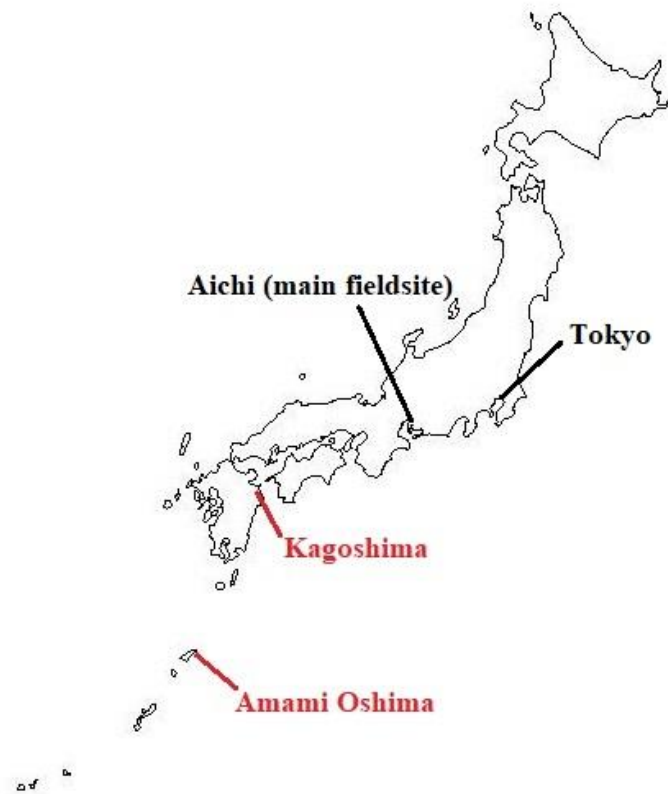
They sell bolts of cloth, mostly silk, which are then made up into kimono, such as these ones in the Goto Gofuku kimono shop, owned by the Goto family in Kasamatsu.



These bolts are called *tanmono*, bolts of kimono fabric usually about 13 metres long and 38 centimetres wide, and they are usually marketed to customers in terms of the cloth's quality, the regional particularities of the techniques used to make them and the occasion for which the kimono can be used. Clients must first buy a *tanmono*, which can range anywhere between 20,000 yen (£128) and 3 million yen (£19,278), depending on the type of fabric, where it was made and who made it, and, importantly, who priced it. The kimono industry does not fix prices, and thus pricing is largely at the shop's discretion. Then the client must pay for it to be sewn to order. Measurements are not made using the metric system (which Japan uses in almost every other circumstance) but the traditional Japanese system of measurement using measurements of *shaku* (30.30cm), *sun* (3.030cm) and (*bu* 3.030mm), with which only the most hardened of kimono aficionados are familiar. In some shops other fees are levied, such as the washing of the cloth before it is sewed. Some shops will also suggest that the bolt undergo a waterproofing procedure

that goes some way to protect the kimono from damage that might be caused by rain or spilled drinks and food. Silk in particular is a fragile textile, prone to shrivelling if exposed to too much water. Since most expensive kimono and formal kimono are made of silk, many customers buying these costly and vulnerable kimono opt for this relatively expensive (and again, not fixed in terms of price) procedure. As a result, customers are never sure what the end price will be, but they know for sure that it will be higher than the number on the price tag.

The second reason that customers tend to distrust kimono shops is that the industry is notorious for infamous sales strategies. Many of my participants feared a tactic known as *kakoikomi*: being surrounded by staff and essentially pressured into purchasing an expensive kimono. In many cases, the understanding is that retailers are ‘out to get you’ and that customers are at a disadvantage. Shops are also renowned for lying about the origins of their products and who made them. Place of origin is extremely important in determining the price and quality of a kimono, and retailers whet the appetites of their customers by telling them about the prestigious origins of their bolts. Such examples include Oshima or Yuki *tsumugi* (pongee) which comes from several locations in Japan. The key feature of both Oshima and Yuki *tsumugi* is that the industry has successfully marketed these kimono as the epitome of good taste and quiet refinement befitting the well-to-do housewife. They are usually very expensive: kimono pricing varies wildly, but these kimono are usually priced about 300,000 yen (£1320). They are also tricky to use, since they are technically not considered to be ‘formal’ wear, and thus cannot be worn to weddings or other ceremonial occasions. They are also not considered appropriate for tea ceremonies, since the nature of the woven fabric makes a rustling noise when the wearer moves, unlike the soft fabrics of formal dyed kimono which are almost completely silent. This noise is considered disruptive in the quiet atmosphere of the tea ceremony. Nonetheless, they have been marketed as a prestige item, the mark of the true kimono connoisseur. The key here is that many customers will have heard of Oshima, and know it to be a particular refined kind of woven fabric and thus a prestigious kimono to own, but in most cases they would not know the details about this fabric and how its authenticity is guaranteed, because it is phenomenally complex. Oshima, for example, may refer to two different producing regions in Japan: Kagoshima in Kyushu and the Amami Oshima islands.



Only true experts are able to tell regional characteristics and, more importantly, authenticity of the bolts simply by looking at them. Not just Oshima kimono bolts, but all kimono bolts will carry one or more stamps on the end of the bolts where the craftsman began weaving the bolt, either by hand or on a machine. Below is the end of a Kagoshima Oshima bolt, complete with stamps and seals¹⁹:

¹⁹ From <https://www.otokokimonokato.com/blog/%E6%9C%AC%E5%A0%B4%E5%A5%84%E7%BE%8E%E3%81%AE%E5%A4%A7%E5%B3%B6%E7%B4%AC/> (retrieved 09/02/2018).

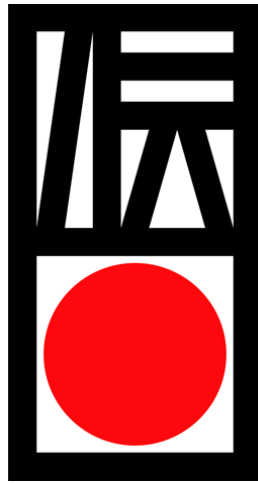


These seals are notorious tricky to decipher, although nominally they are there to certify the authenticity of the bolt. In the case of the Oshima *tsumugi*, the end of the bolt is stuffed with seals and stamps. In the case of Oshima *tsumugi*, the easiest of the seals to decipher is the regional one: the ‘flag’ mark represents a Kagoshima *tsumugi* (below, left)²⁰, and the ‘earth’ mark represents an Amami *tsumugi* (below, right):



There are multiple possible combinations for the seals to come in, depending on the techniques used, whether it was handwoven or machine-woven (since 2006 the ‘earth’ mark is different in the case of machine-woven bolts), the region and the union to which the craftspeople belong. There are too many possible variations to list them all here, but in the case of the bolt above, it includes the mark of Society of the Masters of Traditional Japanese Crafts:

²⁰ From http://himemaru.net/find/2009/10/23/23f_shoushi/ (retrieved 09/02/2018)



This mark denotes that the craftsperson is designated as a ‘*dentō kogeishi*’ or Master Craftsperson, recognised by both the union to which they belong, the association of Masters and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI). In order to become a Master Craftsperson, the candidate needs at least twelve years of experience, and needs to pass both written and practical exams. There is also a condition that requires the craftsperson to practice a craft which has an established history in the region where they practice. Accordingly, few craftspeople have this prestigious stamp, and having it on their goods usually makes them more expensive. The other stamps are those that show that the item has been properly vetted and inspected by the right authorities. It also shows the particularities of the item. The stamp below, for instance, is also an Oshima stamp which guarantees that the bolt has been hand-woven (right-hand column) and that it has passed a quality test (middle section in the blue square).



However, what matters is the ‘official-looking’ quality of the stamps. Because there is such an enormous variety of possible stamps, even in the case of just one type of kimono like the Oshima, people rarely if ever master the knowledge needed to understand exactly what they mean. As a result, official-looking but ultimately meaningless stamps are used to justify expensive prices and even potentially trick a customer. Japan is a society in which seal stamps (*hanko* and *in*) are widely used as signatures and often required for official documents, so much so that there is still a strong demand for ivory in Japan which is used to make the stamps (Danaher 1999: 255). Because the stamps used to guarantee the authenticity of a bolt are difficult to decipher, customers can only rarely tell between the ‘real thing’ and a convincing stamp that is nonetheless not authentic. Regardless of whether they are authentic or not, stamps inspire confidence in the buyer because they make the bolt look more authentic than it may be, even though the viewer cannot actually decipher the code and language of the seals and stamps. I once purchased a kimono bolt from a second-hand shop for 3000 yen out of curiosity since it was stamped as ‘Authentic Ise Katagami (stencil dye)’. I brought the bolt to the kimono shop Azumaya (see Chapters 4 and 5) to authenticate the bolt, and the verdict was that the bolt, while reasonably good quality, could not possibly be a handmade fabric since handmade stencil dye leaves a small patternless border on the outer side of the fabric. The patterns on this bolt reaches the outer side of the fabric, indicating that the bolt was machine-dyed.

Without significant research, a casually interested customer is quickly bewildered. Using the stamps can be a way to muddy the waters when it comes to the true origins and methods used in making the bolt, and thus present a bolt as more desirable and authentic than it really is. It may also be that the retailers themselves have incorrect knowledge about what they are trying to sell. Ima Kikuchi, a writer and kimono fashion guru who features prominently in Chapter 5, described a personal experience of being tricked by a retailer in her book *Kikuchi Ima ga Tsutaetai! Katte ha Ikenai Kimono to Kimono Mawari (Kikuchi Ima Wants To Tell You! Kimono and Kimono Accessories That You Shouldn't Buy)*:

I had slipped into a special sales event at a *tonya* that you can normally only get into on invitation. The normal entrance was closed, and you had to go in round the back. The back entrance had a red and white hanging across the door, the female staff were the sales girls, all manic enthusiasm and excitement, and the atmosphere was like what you would expect in a festival. Everyone was swept up in the feverish excitement, and a buying frenzy kicked in! Purse strings

were being loosened left right and centre. A saleswomen saw me with a grey criss-cross pattern on a white bolt draped over my right shoulder and she exclaimed, ‘you’ve got a good eye! That’s a Shirotaka Omeshi²¹ from Yamagata, that is! They’re lovely *and* rare, that’s a bargain you’ve got there!’

I myself am from Yamagata, so that really spoke to me. After all, here I was, making my way in the Tokyo desert. I made my decision instantly and I asked them to sew it up for me. I think it was about 200,000 yen²². For me that was a tremendous splurge. The kimono became a great favourite of mine. One day when I was folding it, I noticed there was a tag on the reverse of the collar. It said, 100% polyester. I was shaking all over. A polyester Omeshi, not a silk one. And they had the nerve to say it was a Shirotaka, too. I’d been conned! And I’d worn it for years without realising! This is the worst-case scenario – a fake ‘brand’ kimono being sold as the real thing, an insult to the Shirotaka producers. This is why you always have to check the part of the bolt where the weaver started to weave, since the place of manufacture and other information will be listed there.

Kikuchi 2013: 11-12

Even someone with the experience and understanding that Ima-san has can be tricked. The attitude towards customers in the industry can be found in the words of the *tonya* owner described in the vignette at the beginning of this chapter:

Customers don’t know about the kimono, so they don’t know the value of things. They don’t know why things are as expensive as they are. But there’s a reason! It’s hard for the craftspeople to make a living, you know. And craftsmen, they need us *tonya*. They don’t know how to talk to customers. They don’t know how to sell. And well, when you sell things, you have to lie a bit too, you know?

Customers are aware that they are vulnerable, and in many cases they know that people in the industry are ‘lying a bit’. It is this kind of lack of trust that leads particularly savvy customers to make creative choices in the acquisition of their kimono. One such person is Teruko Nakasaka (not to be confused with Kyorei’s owner, Nagasaka-san). A friend of Sachiko’s, Nakasaka-san is a delightfully straightforward woman in her early 60s and a lover of all things Western. She spent many years in the staff of a diplomatic corps in Geneva and won my undying loyalty with her seemingly never-ending supply of European cheeses. The daughter of a *ryokan* (traditional

²¹ *Omeshi* is a type of silk crepe.

²² £1433.

Japanese inn) owner in Kyushu, she had plenty of opportunities to wear the kimono growing up and she continues to wear the kimono to this day. Highly suspicious of kimono shop owners, Nakasaka-san had found a way to cut out kimono shops completely by going directly to an acquaintance of her husband's, a *zuanka* (kimono pattern designer) in Kyoto. She cultivated a relationship with this craftsman, ordering many kimono from him throughout the years. She entrusted him with the task of making her daughter's coming of age *furisode*, complete with all accessories, referred to as *tōtaru kōdinēto*, 'total coordinate', meaning that all parts of the outfit match. Doing this means that she gets exactly what she wants and at a bargain, since she can avoid the commission levied by the wholesalers and the retailers. Eventually, it was through Nakasaka-san that I was able to buy my own formal kimono. She even accompanied me to Kyoto to be present with the craftsman as I explained to him what I wanted.

Middle-aged and older women, the very target market of the industry, feel by and large uncomfortable in the shops that sell the goods targeted at them, and they feel little trust towards the industry in general. What about younger women, those in the 20s and 30s? As we saw in Chapter 2, women this age no longer receive bridal trousseau, and for most of them, their first and possibly only experience of wearing the kimono might be their coming of age ceremony at 20 years old. Kenichi Nakamura, owner of the second-hand chain Tansu-ya, writes that a great many women's first experience of the kimono is the *furisode*: 'All of a sudden they are confronted with the very utmost in formal wear, and it baffles them.' He goes on to explore the results of a survey in which women answered 'no' to the question 'do you like kimono?' Among those respondents were women whose image of the *furisode* had been overwhelmingly negative. 'They had been dressed up, and it was uncomfortable – they couldn't move, couldn't eat and they didn't feel good, among other things' (Nakamura 2006: 151). Nakamura is not wrong to point out the ways in which the kimono can make women uncomfortable or the ways in which it feels alien and unfamiliar. Part of a survey conducted by the Committee for the Study on Japanese Dress affiliated with the Ministry for Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) found that, out of 5097 women aged between 20 and 49, nearly 44% cited the kimono's high price as a barrier to wearing it. Among these, many women further pointed out that kimono pricing was unclear and they did not fully understand why kimono had certain prices (24%). By far the greatest barrier was that they did not know how to wear a kimono (59%). 22% stated that they did not know how to understand the *kaku* or 'ranks' given to kimono by the kimono canon, and thus did not know what to wear for what occasion

(21%). In addition, 37% worried that they did not know how to properly care for kimono, i.e. how to fold them, put them away and what to do if they became dirty or stained (Committee (METI 2015: 18). These findings were very much borne out by research in that the complexity of the kimono, simply as a thing to wear, was enough to put potential wearers off. It should be highlighted though that many people also simply may not have any wish at all to wear the kimono, and thus have no motivation to overcome these barriers, particularly when such financial cost is incurred.

Ordinary Japanese customers might spend their whole lives without ever approaching a kimono shop, or possibly doing so only once or twice. But why is it, then, that kimono shops have found themselves in a situation where those precious customers who *do* actively want their wares, such as Nakasaka-san, will look for other options? In the following section I explore how the kimono industry evolved in the 20th century and how their choices have both shaped kimono culture and caused sales to decline dramatically. I show how the industry came to monopolise knowledge about the kimono and made this knowledge as complex as possible, whilst rendering the inner workings of the industry itself as impenetrable as possible.

2. The commercialisation of knowledge and how the formal kimono strategy backfired

It could be argued that the mainstay of economic anthropology, as a discipline, is exchange. This focus on what is exchanged, how, and by whom dates back to Bronislaw Malinowski and his analysis of the ceremonial gift exchanges in the Kula ring in the Trobriand Islands (Malinowski 1922). Malinowski's analysis of the dual economic system in which Kula shells were passed on to appropriate owners in a closed system whereas other objects were traded in a parallel barter system led to a long-standing distinction in anthropology between gifts on the one hand, and commodities on the other. Malinowski's early work on the Kula later expanded into a prolific anthropological debate on the nature of gift-giving, and Marcel Mauss' theory of the inherent reciprocity of the gift which compels the receiver to return a gift was a major point of theoretical debate (Mauss 1954, Parry 1986, Weiner 1992, Godelier 1999). Since then, economic anthropology has explored other arenas as well, most notably money (Parry and Bloch 1989, Di Muzio and Robbins 2017) and the concept of value (Graeber 2001, Werner and Bell 2004). More recently, anthropologists have focused on markets (Hann and Hart 2011), and the financial crisis (Hart and Ortiz 2008).

Though of course focused primarily on economic life, defined by James Carrier as 'the activities through which people produce, circulate and consume things, the ways that people and societies secure their subsistence or provision themselves' (Carrier 2005: 3), one of the main preoccupations of economic anthropology has been to stress its focus on human sociality and social relations, in opposition to economics. As Richard Wilk and Lisa Cliggett state, 'economic anthropologists argued with economists because they saw them as being ethnocentric and narrow, ignorant of the importance of culture in shaping economic behavior. They thought economists should pay more attention to anthropology and to the diversity of economic systems in the world' (Wilk and Cliggett 2007: 4). There is a deep-rooted understanding that 'economic life cannot be understood unless it is seen in terms of people's society and culture more generally' and thus economic systems must always be examined within their cultural context (Carrier 2005: 5). In this chapter, I examine how the kimono industry, as a hub of economic activity, was able to generate and produce new cultural forms in the shape of the kimono canon. The purpose of this chapter, in addition to being one of the most ethnographic and descriptive of this thesis, is to firstly show how the kimono is an item of material culture embedded in an economic system, but also to demonstrate how the industry to which the kimono belongs is itself an agent for cultural change and creation.

In the following section, I will show first how the kimono retail industry is structured and how the chain of distribution works, and then explore how traditional knowledge about the kimono that used to be passed down in the family became commercialised and turned into a business. I will then explore the parallels between the kimono retail industry and other industries in Japan, such as the funeral and marriage industries, in order to highlight how knowledge has been commercialised and how this in turn allows industries to generate cultural norms and practices surrounding the wares that they produce, but also to generate a dominant cultural narrative about the kimono, namely the set of rules known as the kimono canon. Finally, I will explore how the practice of generating opacity around the inner workings of an industry and maintaining a monopoly over expert knowledge has parallels not just within similar industries in Japan, but also with other areas such as the global finance sector.

In this section, I discuss how the industry has evolved in the 20th century to generate a screen of secrecy and opacity around its inner workings. This was done in order to create a knowledge monopoly around the kimono and ensure that customers were unable to rely on their own expertise when it came to purchasing a kimono and became almost entirely reliant on the industry to provide this knowledge. This in turn made it possible for the industry to price their goods at their own discretion and made it difficult for customers to challenge the retailers on their ever-increasing prices.

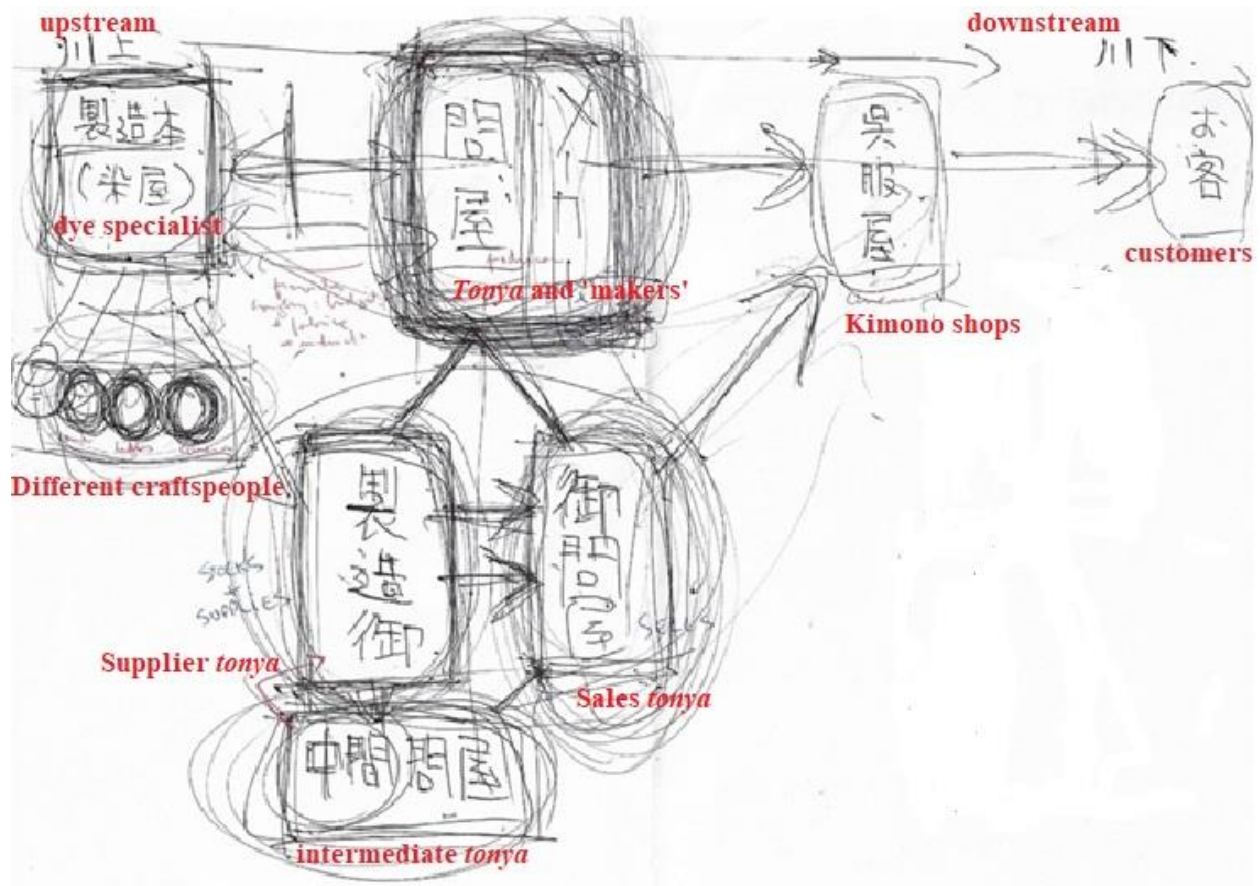
Departmental stores such as Mitsukoshi and Takashimaya are major features of the socio-economic landscape of Japan, not to mention the actual townscapes. Takashimaya for instance started out in 1831 as a kimono shop specialised in fabrics and run by a couple known as the Iidas (Matsunaga 2000: 12; see also Moeran in Macpherson 1998). Many of these departmental stores, such as Daimaru, Takashimaya, Matsuzakaya and Mitsukoshi, started out as kimono shops, *gofukuya*, and many of them maintain a kimono shop on one of the floors of their stores, which are usually housed in buildings all to themselves (Kijima in Koizumi 2006: 68). Such was the power of the kimono shop that they were at the heart of commercial empires that were to dominate the consumer landscape for decades to come.

The *gofuku* industry has a long history. The modern kimono retail industry has its roots in the retail systems of the Edo period. Naoko Takesue argues that we can understand the current industry as simply a more complex version of the original structure of the industry (Takesue 2014:

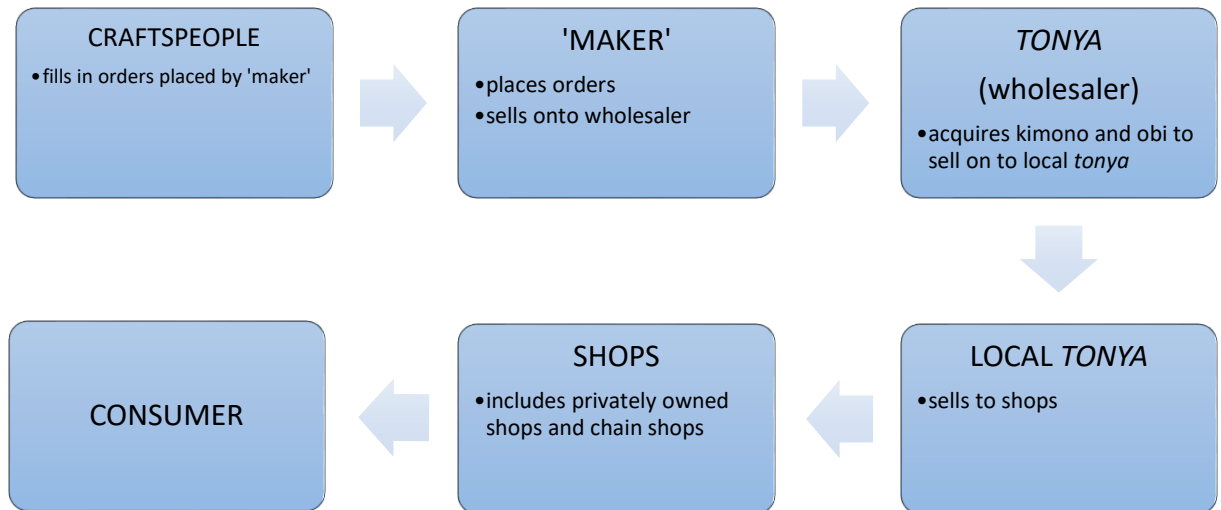
i). While changes in managerial structure were introduced after World War Two, the industry in the post-war period up until the economic recession of the 1990s maintained a rigid division of labour in which each element had its place (Valk 2017: 16-17). The most powerful part of the chain is the wholesaler, known as *tonya* in Japanese. The *tonya* are in charge of bringing together all the goods and selling them on to either regional, smaller *tonya* or directly on to shops and department stores. *Tonya* work closely with ‘makers’ who are businesses in charge of placing orders with craftspeople. *Tonya* themselves may be subdivided into different types, such as suppliers of materials and those who are directly in charge of selling on the finished bolts. There are also specialists, such as those who specialise in *furisode* (long-sleeved kimono), the products of certain regions²³, *tonya* specialised in kimono accessories such as *zori* shoes, *tabi* socks, and *himo* belts to name but a few, collectively known as *komono*. In almost all cases, craftspeople have no involvement whatsoever in the process of selling to customers. As the *tonya* owner who came to Kyorei’s event stated, ‘craftsmen need us *tonya*. They don’t know how to talk to customers. They don’t know how to sell.’ The production of kimono is extremely specialised and involves a bewilderingly complex subdivision of labour, and as such requires craftspeople to each be specialised in one specific task. It was quite frequent for those involved in the *tonya* part of the industry to look down on the craftspeople as unable to do anything other than make things, and as being helpless without the *tonya*.

In an effort to help me understand how the industry was structured, Takaharu Goto, owner of kimono shop Goto Gofuku and the second-hand chain of shops Go-Ichi-Maru (who will feature more prominently in the last section of this chapter) endeavoured to explain it to me in a visual manner. He worked for a long time in a specialist maker business who oversaw craftspeople making a type of kimono called ‘Yūzen dye’ He sketched this drawing for me, explaining to me that I could draw parallels with the film industry: ‘you see, the craftspeople are the actors. The maker is the director, he tells the actors what to do. The *tonya* is the producer, he oversees the whole thing. The kimono shop is the cinema, and the customers are of course the viewers’. Pursuing Goto-san’s analogy to its fullest extent, it is of course the case that cinema owners have little to do with the actors in the films they show. In much the same way, kimono shop owners usually have nothing to do with the craftspeople who make their goods.

²³ Kimono and obi fabric producing regions are known as *sanchi*.



Here is a simplified version of his sketch, detailing the flow from the craftspeople who make the kimono and obi.



As Esther Goody points out, there is a tendency to associate division of labour with post-industrial revolution factory lines and mechanised production but in fact highly sophisticated divisions of labour existed well before the industrial revolution (Goody 1982: 1-2). The current kimono industry is a hybrid system, based on a division of labour that dates back to the Edo period (1600-1868) and updated after World War Two with contemporary business models. Since then, the chain of distribution and overall structure of the industry remained virtually unchanged until the 1990s when the economic crisis caused a great many old *tonya* and makers to fold. Nevertheless, this structure has remained in place and although it is easier than it used to be to breach boundaries between the different stages it still takes considerable effort and willpower to do so.

Given this industry's old roots and general opacity, it is no wonder that customers feel bewildered by how exactly kimono bolts come to arrive on the shelves of the kimono shop. Another feature of the industry which is equally nebulous is its pricing. Unlike other industries, the pricing is largely a matter agreed between the individual shop and their supplier, the *tonya*. Because these arrangements vary from shop to shop, the prices also vary. As the bolts make their way downstream towards the customer, each partner involved in its production and sale picks up a premium. Because of this, there is no reference price for kimono, leading to the often resigned way in which my participants would refer to kimono as 'having no price'. Customers are of course not completely unaware of what is going on. Teruko Nakasaka, who elected to bypass shops almost entirely, had a great degree of insight into how the industry worked and spoke in sharply critical ways about the industry:

There are lots of stages between the craftsman and the customers. Companies called *tonya*. They make everything really expensive. Say a kimono takes 150,000 yen (£1040) to make, with the tools, the dye and the cloth and everything. Then the *tonya* take their premium, so that could double the price, or even triple it. Then the retailers take *their* premium, and so you can end up with something that took 150,000 yen (£1040) to make but the consumer buys for 400,000 (£2771) or 500,000 yen (£3560)! It's because it's so expensive that the kimono is dying out. That and the fact that people can't wear them. Wealthy people can afford kimono, but not regular people. You'll find that kimono always have something to do with money.

Japanese customers are aware that they may well be overcharged, but they remain largely at the mercy of the retailers when they purchase kimono. This is because the industry has successfully created a monopoly on knowledge about the kimono. They have not only controlled knowledge, they have actively generated it themselves. Many studies of traditional clothing tend to explore the cultural significance of clothing abstracted from the economic contexts in which clothes are embedded, because there is a perception that ‘traditional clothes’ are separate from the industrial fashion system. Francks challenges the notion that ‘involvement in fashion depends on the adoption of Western-style dress’ by showing how fabrics produced for kimono were a driving force in the industrialisation of Japan (Francks and Hunter 2012: 152). In addition to playing a key role in Japan’s economic development, the kimono industry, through a monopoly over knowledge about the kimono, was increasingly able to define how and when kimono were to be used. One of their legacies is the ‘kimono canon’, the body of rules that govern kimono taste, style, and ways of dressing even today. To trace how this happened, we need to take a step back in time.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the kimono was still everyday wear for women (Dalby, 2001, Milhaupt 2014, Valk 2017). Men had started wearing Western clothes much earlier than women, as early as the late 19th century. As part of the push towards modernisation and the race to catch up with Western powers, men were encouraged to wear Western clothes as a sign that they were embracing not just the new modern age but a new modern Japanese identity (Milhaupt 2014: 62, Koike, Noguchi and Komura 2000: 102). By contrast, women continued to wear Japanese dress well into the 20th century, with the lasting effect that the kimono is now associated primarily with women, although male forms of the dress do exist (Hanley 1997:167). Both Milhaupt and Goldstein-Gidoni argue that this is part of a pattern in Japanese society where women are associated with *wa* (Japan) and thus traditional culture and values, as opposed to men who are associated with *yō* and Western culture (Goldstein-Gidoni 1999, Milhaupt 2014: 62). Margaret Maynard notes, however, that in many cultures across the world, it generally seems to be men who adopt Western clothing the quickest (Maynard 2004: 5).

Kimono are, in their very material design, rather economical clothes. They can be taken apart and sewn back together. Because kimono are cut from a single bolt of fabric using straight lines, when a kimono is taken apart it can actually be returned to bolt state. This means a kimono can be re-stitched multiple times, and thus allows the kimono to be used again and again for a long time. It thus allowed for multiple generations to wear the same kimono, and that was the norm for

families in the early 20th century (Fujiwara in Koizumi 2006: 132). This was necessary for washing but also to resize the kimono for someone else in the family. It was commonplace for kimono to be worn until they could no longer be worn anymore and then the fabric would be reused for something else: dishcloths or sleepwear being among the more common usages (*ibid*). This practical knowledge of how to handle, sew and repair kimono was passed down from mother to daughter. Kazuko Koizumi, who was born in 1933, recalls her mother's knowledge: 'as was the case in many households in the past, my mother took care of all things related to the kimono: from sewing to cleaning and care, right up to re-using the fabric for other things. She did it all herself' (Koizumi 2006: 26). Koizumi's mother was born in 1901, and it appears that she was particularly talented with needlework, so much so that relatives and friends would ask her to make things for them.

Nonetheless, Koizumi notes that knowledge of how to care for one's own kimono was commonplace in her mother's generation. She pinpoints the real shift from Japanese clothes to Western clothes to the Showa period (1926-1989), and the final stage of this 'clothing revolution' took place in the 1970s (Koizumi 2006: 14). World War Two was instrumental in accelerating this shift. Encouraging its population to be thrifty, the wartime government enforced the wear of *monpe* (a kind of *sagyō-gi* – active wear – involving trousers, typically associated with the farmers) and considered the single-piece kimono as 'too luxurious' for wartime. Kimono factories closed down during the war (Nakamura 2006: 150) and in the immediate poverty-stricken post-war period, fabrics were rationed until 1951 and most clothes were made at home from whatever was available (Gordon 2012: 190-191). Andrew Gordon has investigated the extraordinary popularity of sewing in post-war Japan: in the early 1950s, women in Japan devoted almost three hours a day to sewing, as opposed to one hour for women in the US and France (Gordon in Hunter and Francks 2012: 57). By the 1960s, 72% of Japanese households owned a sewing machine, second only to the radio (*ibid* 60). The wartime shift to *monpe* and then the post-war change towards making one's own clothes facilitated the transition towards Western clothes since it was easier, cheaper and less time-consuming to run up clothes on a sewing machine than sew a kimono by hand. Synthetic materials and wool were much more affordable than silk, and further encouraged the trend towards Western clothes. When Japan became wealthier in the 1960s and 70s, a 'kimono boom' took place, so much so that the kimono became the must-have item for well-to-do housewives.

This transition is borne out by the stories of my participants in their 50s and 60s, who recalled that their grandparents had been the last to live lives in which Japanese clothes had been the norm. In the literature too, there are many accounts of this. Kazuko Koizumi, though she does not go into much detail on this, highlights how the war made a difference on dress choices within her own family: ‘the only people in my family to have worn the kimono their entire lives were my grandfather, who died in 1926, and my grandmother, who died in 1946’ (*ibid*). Based on the way her grandparents on her mother’s side, who lived into the post-war period, gradually gave up Japanese clothes for Western clothes, she estimates that this would have happened to her grandparents on her father’s side too, had they lived into the post-war period: ‘I believe that this kind of transition occurred not just in my family, but in families across Japan as well’ (*ibid*). The knowledge of how to sew and make clothes did not truly disappear in post-war Japan – it was transformed. Andrew Gordon describes the sky-high demand for sewing machines during the war in post-war Japan: ‘because the sewing machine had long been understood as a tool suited only for the fabrication of Western clothing, the swift post-war shift to this mode of dress unleashed a flood of demand for it. By 1960, as many as 72 per cent of Japan’s 20 million households possessed one, making it the second most widely owned consumer machine, after the radio at 89 per cent (and well ahead of the television at 55 per cent)’ (Gordon in Francks and Hunter 2012: 60).

Kimono retained their dual classification system of *fudangi* (everyday wear) and *yosoiki* (formal wear), but by the 1970s formal wear had far outstripped *fudangi*. One aspect of this transformation was that the lifestyle of the Japanese had changed in the immediate post-war period. American culture flowed into the homes of the Japanese during the Occupation (1945-1952) and thereon after home life was transformed. Homes became Westernised, and the kimono was ill-suited to the practicalities of day to day life, such as driving. It was, however, this retreat of the kimono from day to day life that enabled its role as ceremonial, formal wear to become so strong. As Liza Dalby writes, ‘the everyday activities of modern life are not easily carried out in kimono. Yet in spite of its commonly acknowledged disfunctionality, the kimono has not simply disappeared. As kimono’s social sphere has contracted, its symbolic importance has intensified’ (Dalby 2001: 125).

There are several ways of understanding how the ceremonial kimono became so deeply anchored in ritual life in the second half of the 20th century. The shift towards Western clothes is certainly a major contributing factor, and socio-economic factors in the second-half of the 20th

century have been quite well documented (Dalby 2006, Milhaupt 2014, Valk 2017). Penelope Francks argues that the industry responded to the demands of the market by keeping this structure which enabled it to generate revenue. She also argues that the customer was largely in charge of setting trends and fashion (Francks in Francks and Hunter 2012: 171). This was perhaps true in the case of the pre-war years, but even then the industry had a strong hand in dictating trends and styles. With the abolition of the class system in 1869 dress codes were no longer fixed by class, and the erstwhile peasants and merchants of Japan aspired to the styles of the old samurai class and the imperial court (Slade 2009: 129). This led to the establishment of dress codes for formal occasions that held across classes and appealed to as many people as possible (Koizumi 2006: 39). Noriko Harada notes that women in the early 20th century began to attend public events and formal, ritual events more, and as a result, they needed a new kind of formal wear. A particularly savvy invention on the part of the industry was the *hōmongi* in the Taisho era (1912-1926), which is now women's formal wear par excellence (Harada in Koizumi 2006: 39). Toby Slade writes that by the Taisho period, department stores, many of which started out as kimono shops, were involved in marketing trends in kimono style (Slade 2009: 132; see also Milhaupt 2014: 104-5). In this way, the industry was instrumental in establishing not just trends but the modern rules of the 'kimono canon' itself. Many of these rules had not existed before the 20th century. Many of these rules, such as the *montsuki hakama*²⁴ for men, and the *hōmongi* and *tomesode*²⁵ kimono for women, invented in the early 20th century, remain entrenched today. This is the reason why there is a proliferation of types of kimono for women and very few for men: the industry knew that they could no longer expect men to buy kimono, but there was a lucrative market in selling to women and creating ever-expanding types of kimono that women felt they needed to have in order to be equipped for every possible occasion.

As a side note, it is worth mentioning that one could quite easily view this emergence of new formal kimono throughout the 20th century through the lens of 'invented traditions', as Lee A. Thompson did in his analysis of sumo wrestling as a 'modern' invention based on 'spurious history' (Thompson in Vlastos 1998: 176). On this topic I take Marshall Sahlins approach in viewing these

²⁴ An ensemble consisting of a kimono (usually black), a black *haori* overcoat with five family crests: two on the arms, two on the shoulders and one on the back, and a *hakama* (a pair of trousers that go over the kimono).

²⁵ A *hōmongi* is a type of kimono usually worn by women to attend functions such as weddings and school entrance or graduation ceremonies. A *tomesode* is a kimono that is normally black (unless it is an *irotomesode* in which case it will be coloured) with a pattern around the hem. This kimono is exclusively worn by the mother of the bride or groom at her child's wedding.

examples of the ‘inventiveness of tradition’ as it adapts to modern times and mores (Sahlins 1999: 408-9). A tradition being entrenched for 40 years could matter more to people and appear more relevant than one which has the supposedly greater authority of being entrenched for 400 years. Of greater interest to the discussion here, however, is the way that new culture does not evolve separately and distinct from economic forces, which may well be the single strongest driving force behind their creation.

The process of formalisation for kimono began in the early 20th century, but it accelerated after World War Two. I argue that in the second half of the 20th century, the industry assumed a much stronger role than the customer in dictating the trends and types of kimono that became available. The market and consumer demand was much weaker in determining what sort of kimono the industry would make. I argue that it is the hidden side of the equation, the industry, which was chiefly responsible for generating trends and styles from the 1950s onwards, and thus economic activity was deeply implicated both in the creation of kimono culture and into family ritual life. This is linked to the commercialisation of knowledge about the kimono. As we have seen, knowledge about how to make the kimono has all but disappeared from home life in Japan. This is also true of the ability to put on a kimono, but also the ability to recognise the types of textiles that are used for making kimono. By the 1970s, women had some knowledge but they were surpassed by kimono retailers, who positioned themselves not just as salespeople but as kimono consultants – the source and dispensers of knowledge about the kimono.

Until the 1990s, kimono were still considered to be essential tools for ritual occasions. This is tied to the fact that Japan is a society in which ritual forms and moments have a great deal of significance and weight in day to day life. Although Japanese society appears to be changing towards a more individualised society in which the so-called traditional forms carry less potency and meaning than they did in the 1960s and 70s, we still see Japanese people taking part in prayer at shrines and Buddhist temples, buying protective amulets and using the services of marriage and funeral companies that provide a blend of old and modern customs and rituals to suit the tastes of modern consumers with certain ritualistic tendencies (Bremen and Martinez 1995, Daniels in Shove, Trentmann and Wilk 2009).

There has been some debate in the anthropology of Japan as to whether the importance of ritual forms makes Japan a ‘traditional’ or a ‘modern’ society (see Bremen and Martinez 1995). To investigate this question fully would take me far from the premise of this chapter but suffice to

say here that the conclusion drawn in the literature is that Japan is both modern and ‘traditional’, insofar as tradition is thought to be the antithesis of modernity, which itself appears to be a flawed premise. Returning to the importance of ritual form, and thus the role of the kimono in ritual, there is an attachment in Japan to performing and creating the correct ‘form’ for ritual, something which has been noted for the tea ceremony for instance, in which performing the correct gestures and steps is essential (Anderson 1991, Mori 1991). Another example is praying at Japanese shrines. Phil Swift argues that the pursuit of form is actually the point of the activity. Based on Daniel Miller’s concept of ‘depth ontology’, an implicit Western disparagement of surfaces in favour of the ‘real’ meaning underneath, Swift argues that ‘it is, in fact, precisely the sensuous and technical aspects – the surfaces – of ritual form that makes it efficacious’ (Swift 2010: 10). Wearing the right kimono for the correct ritual occasions, such as a *hōmongi* kimono for a school entrance ceremony or for presenting a newborn child to a shrine, was considered essential for the correct practice of ritual. Further, Japan is a society in which ‘losing face’ and ‘saving face’ is key, and therefore maintaining the correct form during ritual occasions is key, since failure to do so could result in losing face. This is why having the ‘right’ kimono became such an emotionally charged problem, and this was in turn why the kimono industry had much to gain by offering advice on how to obtain and wear the right kimono.

Since formal kimono were deemed essential for ritual life in Japan, at least until the 1990s, the industry had a handy formula for profit and they were free to drive up prices for an item that customers needed. Formal kimono were profitable, and *fudangi* or ‘every day’ wear kimono were not. Yoshihide Shibakawa, the owner of the kimono shop Azumaya (see Chapter 4) recalled the formal kimono’s glory days: ‘the shops could rely on selling kimono that cost a million yen (£6484) regularly. If you can sell just one, then you can live comfortably for three months. So why would you bother with anything else?’ National statistics too show how well the formal kimono did in the 1970s. The Committee for the Study on Japanese Dress, organised by the Ministry for Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), found that demand for the silk dyed kimono boomed in 1955, steadily increasing in the second half of the twentieth century. In 1975, the industry peaked, with sales reaching 2.8 trillion yen, roughly £18 billion (Ministry of Trade, Economy and Industry 2015). The industry thus contributed to the near-complete elimination of *fudangi* from Japanese society by concentrating almost exclusively on formal kimono. In this way, they reinforced the social and cultural shift towards the formalisation of the kimono.

The opacity of the industry also reinforced the retailer's control over knowledge about the kimono. It enabled the industry, for instance, to hide the origin of the silk used in making kimono. According to the owners of Go-Ichi-Maru (featured later in the chapter), much of the silk is produced abroad, either in Brazil, Vietnam or China. And kimono themselves are usually stitched abroad, often in China, where labour is cheaper. Customers had few options but to trust the counsel of the shop owners that the kimono were indeed what the retailers said they were, and if the quality truly reflected the price. There has been an increasing amount of literature in Japanese which is critical of the kimono industry. Ima Kikuchi is of course one of these writers, but there are others such as Motoshige Itō and Takatoshi Yajima. Itō is a Professor at the Faculty of International Social Sciences in Gakushuin University and Yajima was the CEO of Yamato, a chain of kimono shops, from 1988 to 2010. Their book, which follows the format of a discussion between the two men, details how the industry puts its customers at a disadvantage:

Yajima: The fact that customers find all things kimono hard to understand is a structural issue in the industry itself. It's no wonder they are criticised as an industry making things deliberately hard to understand so that they can sell things at high prices.

Itō: Their business model will crumble if they try to change that.

(Itō and Yajima 2016: 48-49)

It is perhaps because Yajima is no longer a part of the industry that he can allow himself to be critical of it. Yajima furthers adds that the industry generated a logic whereby 'formal kimono *have* to be expensive' so as to desensitise customers to the prices and make expensive kimono the norm. He gives the example of the bridal kimono:

Itō: How come the industry focused exclusively on formal wear?

Yajima: Things are easy for the retailers when they limit things to formal wear. They make up things like a set for bridal wear, and when they tell customers 'this is traditional bridal wear, so you need all these parts', the customers accept it.

Itō: The word 'tradition' is the silver bullet, isn't it? If you use it then customers think 'well that's the way it's supposed to be' and they buy it.

(Itō and Yajima 2016: 48-49)

Itō and Yajima's conversation point to the way the industry is directly involved in the generation of kimono culture because they have control over the way knowledge about the kimono is generated. In this way, it can be said that the industry itself shapes culture more than the market, demand or the fashion sense of the customers.

There are parallels with other areas of life in Japan in which industries have commercialised knowledge that used to be integral to the family, particularly knowledge that is related to key life events and ritual occasions such as weddings, funerals and seasonal events such as gift-giving in high summer (*ochūgen*) and winter (*oseibo*). As Inge Daniels notes,

Ritual knowledge pertaining to specific 'annual events', once transferred through local communities and the extended families within, is now primarily managed by commercial businesses such as funeral and wedding companies as well as producers and distributors of advice literature. Moreover, through resourceful commodity promotion and innovation, local businesses have been able not only to adapt to and align themselves with, but also successfully to steer domestic rhythms of consumption.

Daniels in Shove, Trentmann and Wilk 2009: 184

Because Japan is a society that attaches a great deal of importance to ritual, many people feel compelled to use the services of companies that cater to ritual occasions. Hikaru Suzuki, writing on the commercialisation of the funeral industry in Japan, demonstrates how the funeral services took over the practices and rituals associated with caring for the dead (Suzuki 2000: 39). Katherine Rupp notes that, until the 1960s, wakes and funerals in her field site were held in the home but by the early 21st century funeral companies had entirely taken over funeral practices (Rupp 2003: 95-6; see also Tsuji 2006: 399). Nowadays, almost all Japanese people use the services of the funeral industry. Since they require the services and the knowledge of the funeral industry to perform the rituals and ceremonies that Japanese people consider important on these occasions, they place their faith in the expertise of the company. This meant that the funeral industry was free to commercialise the knowledge that was once family lore. One such ritual is the bathing of the deceased's body (Suzuki 2000: 185). This ritual aimed at purifying the body and soul of the deceased, but it largely disappeared after World War Two. The industry successfully revived this custom and marketed it as 'traditional', 'unique' and 'effective' – a product that they could sell (Suzuki 2000: 186).

A similar phenomenon has taken place in the marriage industry as well. By the 1990s, 80% of urban Japanese couples chose the services of commercial wedding companies, which provide packages containing a schedule, photography, a venue and formal ritual activities such as Western style chapel wedding, a cake-cutting, but also Japanese elements such as a shrine wedding (Goldstein-Gidoni 2001: 24). Goldstein-Gidoni argues that pre-war wedding ceremonies in the lower classes were typically quite simple affairs, and that complex wedding ceremonies only came later with the establishment of the modern marriage industry: ‘the profit motive was a major reason for the development of the fixed wedding offered by the new wedding parlors, since owners wanted to reap profits from every stage of the wedding day, beginning with the preparation of the bride and ending with the reception’ (*ibid*). In much the same way as kimono retailers see themselves as essential advisers to consumers who do not fully understand the kimono, wedding industry advisors see themselves as providing services and knowledge to a largely ignorant public. Walter Edwards has analysed the growth of wedding companies and services in Japan. In his work on weddings in Japan, Edwards quotes Hajime Nakahara, a director at the White Crane Palace wedding service:

“We’re considered one of the elite establishments in the city, so most of the people who come to us are true middle-class types – not very refined.” Unfamiliar with the details of formality, they require patient coaching before, and skilful cueing during, the performance. “We have to coddle them a bit,” he complained mildly, “because they don’t know all that much about ceremony.”

Edwards 1989: 78

As Edwards further writes, Nakahara’s words ‘point to the larger process of the ordinary person’s alienation from ritual expertise, a process that has accompanied the growth of the commercial wedding industry’ (Edwards 1989: 78)

The similarities with the kimono industry are many: the key transition period of World War Two, the way in which family knowledge became commercialised and the manner in which customers still want these traditional forms of culture, particularly at key ritual moments in life, but are largely at the mercy of professionals in the industry and their expertise.

Creating opacity around their inner dealings enables industries focusing on traditional customs and material culture to generate expert knowledge and thus make themselves indispensable, thereby giving them the ability to not just change culture but also generate it. This

may on the surface appear to be an interesting case study limited to Japanese society, and certainly some aspects of this phenomenon are culture-bound, such as the commodification of knowledge that used to be passed down from generation to generation within the home and the establishment of business and industries based on traditional rituals such as funeral rites and wakes. However, we can find the process of generating opacity and utilising expert knowledge to maximise profit in contexts that are very different from those of the kimono, marriage and funeral industries in Japan. Take, for example, the role of financial analysts in financial markets. It goes without saying that financial markets are immensely complex and are largely impenetrable to those without sufficient knowledge (MacKenzie 2009: 250). Much like the kimono industry, financial markets have an inbuilt opacity and secrecy that works to the advantage of those who are in the know when it comes to their products. Alex Preda has analysed the emergence of financial experts who are hired by major financial institutions to provide economic expertise (Preda in Callon, Millo and Muniesa 2007: 40). These experts are successful because they are able to market their expertise and knowledge about financial markets, which in turn gives them enormous power to influence the understandings and agendas of those to whom they market their knowledge (*ibid* 46). Preda argues that the ultimate goal of these experts is to ‘achieve stability and monopolistic closure’, thus allowing them to shape the agendas of their ‘customers’, who are in a way ‘pre-configured’ to take on board the knowledge that is being marketed to them because the experts have authority. Preda draws a comparison between these experts and how the producers of Apple software influence their customers:

[some] Apple users, who are status groups (creative, unconventional, upper income) and have entered a relationship of mutual susceptibility with the producers of Apple software. Instead of withdrawing from the stage, producers act as intermediaries between user groups, actively influencing the constitution of the users’ agendas and interests.

Preda in Callon, Millo and Muniesa 2007: 45

Knowledge, then, is the key which allows experts in fields as different as the kimono industry, Apple and financial markets, to establish a position of authority from which they can successfully market their wares. They are greatly aided in this if the inner workings of their industry is shielded by secrecy and is hard for an outsider to comprehend. The other side of the equation is the

consumer ‘not knowing’. Roy Dilley writes that ignorance and not knowing are potential sources of ‘anxiety’ and ‘uncertainty’ (Dilley in Marchand 2010: 179).

The key difference being that the kimono industry’s business model is much riskier in that they can only sell the one product, and they did not take into account the way Japanese society is changing. There is little doubt that the industry is struggling: the market size for the industry in 2015 was 280.5 billion yen, a mere 10% of what it was in the mid-1970s²⁶. As I explored in Chapter 2, kimono are no longer considered to be almost mandatory formal wear for weddings and ceremonies, and buying kimono for bridal trousseaus is no longer common practice. The customer base for the industry is shrinking fast, and many women in their 60s and 70s feel that they no longer need any kimono: they have all the ones they need for ceremonial wear already. With no other customers interested in the wares that they are selling, the kimono industry is facing a crisis, something felt keenly by many of the participants in my research. Yoshihide Shibakawa was adamant that the industry as it stands might not last another ten years, unless it changes. Kimono designer Jotaro Saito was certain that formal kimono like the *hōmongi* would eventually die out completely, and he thought that this was not necessarily a bad thing. The disappearance of these types of kimono would adversely affect craftspeople, however. Shūichi Kanamaru, a Kaga Yūzen dye craftsman in Kanazawa, spoke to me of his concern for his craft and the industry as a whole: ‘we’ve hit a wall, wondering what we should do now. It’s reached the point where young people cannot get into the business at all because they can’t easily make a living. It’s fine if you want to do it as a hobby, if you find it fun, but not for a living.’

The vast majority of the industry has yet to adapt to the new landscape. Instead, it has gone into survival mode, and retailers are now strategising in order to stay in business as long as they can. In the following section, I give ethnographic snapshots into the survival strategies of kimono shops in Toyota.

²⁶ From the Yano Research Institute.

3. Tales of grit and glamour: two kimono shops in Toyota strategise to survive

To conclude this chapter, I will give an account of one of two shops in Toyota and their different survival strategies. Kimono shops are typically divided into several categories: large-scale kimono chains such as Yamato, department store shops such as Takashimaya and Mitsukoshi, and small family-run shops. These were the shops that were the most resilient in the 1990s economic crisis. When it comes to supplying kimono, many shops ‘rent’ their wares from the *tonya* to avoid the problem of unsold stock. If they are unsold, the wares will be returned to the *tonya*. In the 1970s and 80s, kimono shops were notorious for trying to ingratiate themselves with customers, and they would organise trips for their customers, as well as prize giveaways (such as rice and steak) and run cheap *kitsuke* (kimono dressing) classes.

Nowadays, many kimono shops struggle to make ends meet. They have fewer and fewer clients as the role of the kimono in ritual life diminishes and the generation for whom it is important to have the ‘right’ kimono for the right occasion is shrinking. As a result, many of them turn to different strategies to survive. Here are two stories of survival from Toyota.

Go-Ichi-Maru



Go-Ichi-Maru is a small second-hand kimono shop wedged uneasily between Western fashion shops in a shopping mall next to the Toyota train station. The shopping centre, Meglia Center, is run by the Toyota Consumer Cooperative and the Goto family rent the small space there.

In late November 2015, I had told my host mother Sachiko that I was interested in kimono shops, and she had racked her brains for places to introduce me to. She had already introduced me to Kyorei, whose owner, Nagasaka-san, she was well-acquainted with and was a long-standing customer. She felt unsure of who she could introduce me to given how little she had interacted with kimono shop owners aside from Nagasaka-san. Instead, she took me somewhere she felt was easier to just pop in and have a look, since most typical shops have their own building and, as discussed earlier in this chapter, kimono shops are daunting, even for Sachiko. The reason that she found Go-Ichi-Maru less intimidating was because it was located in a shopping centre, which lends itself to browsing-type shopping, unlike the more intimate atmosphere of an individual shop. Go-Ichi-Maru is in fact a second hand shop, which is part of its survival strategy. This too, lends itself to browsing because the items are priced between 500 yen (£3.7) and 3000 yen (£19.6) and are not bespoke. This makes it easier for customers to dip in and out without necessarily buying anything, which makes the experience of shopping here altogether unlike ordinary kimono shops.

After Sachiko mediated for me, the lone worker at the till, a woman with short grey hair in her 50s, arranged an interview for me with the owner of the shop, Takaharu Goto who is in his late forties. He runs Go-Ichi-Maru, which, as it turned out, is actually four separate shops. Three of them sell mainly second-hand kimono and obi, and all the shops are located within Aichi Prefecture. The fourth has a different name and is called Goto Gofuku. Located in the neighbouring prefecture of Gifu in the small town of Kasamatsu, this shop was the family's original business, a 'true' bespoke *gofukuya* (kimono shop) located in a stunning traditional Japanese building, complete with garden and a *kura* storage house. Whilst this original shop carries the family name, the second hand venture is a play on words based on their family name. The family name Goto is comprised of two characters, 五藤, which means 'five' and 'wisteria'. The syllable 'to' can also mean ten if another character (十) is used. Playing on this potentially different meaning, Go-Ichi-Maru literally means 'Five One Zero' and thus 'Five Ten'.

'No one will be as frank with you as me,' Goto-san said confidently. 'I am probably the only one who will tell you things as they are. I am something of a *gofuku* buff²⁷. The *gofuku*

²⁷ He, and indeed many others in the kimono and *gofuku* circles, used the word '*maniakku*' to describe himself, derived from the English 'maniac', by which he means someone with an overly keen interest in the way the industry works. This phrase is a way of poking fun at oneself while simultaneous affirming one's deep knowledge about the topic.

industry is very vague, though. Other people might tell you something completely different though!’

Goto-san was keen to talk about his work. Before taking over the family shop he had worked for 10 years in a ‘maker’ business in Kyoto specialised in Yūzen dye. He had also reflected at great length on the way the industry had changed as a result of the recession in the 1990s.

‘Well, 30 years ago, business was good,’ he told me. ‘In the 1960s and 70s, people could afford the kimono, and many could wear it. People used to know which shop to go based on what type of kimono they wanted, and the chain of distribution was all separated out depending on the *type* of kimono. Since the economy crashed, we’ve gone from a market of 2 trillion yen to 1 trillion yen, then to 200 million yen... All the different types of shops that used to be clearly defined, it’s all mixed together. It’s chaos. That’s why kimono are such a mystery to everyone. People say *kimono ha nedan ga nai* (kimono don’t have a price) but it’s not true. They do have a price. It’s just hard to understand.

‘Think about it,’ he said. ‘Kimono are not like brand goods. A brand is a mark on a bag or a coat, it tells you exactly what it is. Kimono from certain areas have reputations for class or quality, but it’s never as clear. With kimono, it’s the way they are made that defines the price. A Hermes bag might take three weeks to make. A Yuki *tsumugi* takes nine months. Nine months! So that kimono’s price is the craftspeople’s salary. When you think of it that way, one and a half million is the very lowest price, particularly since the makers and *tonya* all take a premium. The craftspeople barely make a living.’

He paused before adding, somewhat contradictorily, ‘mind you, back in the day people didn’t seem to have much of a clue either!’

I asked him about the origins of the family’s second-hand kimono venture.

‘Business was really difficult in the old family shop in Gifu. That’s why I started selling second-hand kimono. I couldn’t have done that in Gifu, though – our customers expect a ‘proper’ kimono shop so I had to go elsewhere. Still even here I don’t borrow from the *tonya*. I buy everything.’

Goto-san was clear-eyed about the situation in the industry, and he was not afraid to be honest about how difficult things were for his family. Nonetheless, Goto-san agreed to let me come to the shop and help his mother during her 4-hour Saturday shift. I was quickly to find out that she was the true authority of the outfit. She was held in such esteem that she was known as Goto-

sensei. I quickly learned that most customers came specifically to seek her advice, although many trusted her son's advice too. There was even a notice board with the times when either Goto-san or Goto-sensei were in the shop, so people knew when to come.

I went for my first 'shift' at Go-Ichi-Maru on Saturday 5th December 2015. Goto-sensei was a dignified woman in her late 60s, but she was also warm and approachable. She had a mischievous side, and she would frequently go under cover in other kimono shops to scope out their wares. When she did, she pretended that she couldn't roll up kimono bolts, since that skill is normally only possessed by people in the industry who have learned the proper way to do it. Like her son, she enjoyed talking, and she particularly enjoyed telling me about the different wares in the shop. She had also arranged for her husband, Takamichi Goto, to come to talk to me. Her husband was quite a bit older than her, already in his 80s, and as she sent us in the direction of the nearest café she told me somewhat apologetically, 'he's not used to those sorts of places – he may not know how to pay!' I assured her that I would take care of him.

Once I had settled him down and taken stock of the fact that he was quite deaf, I asked him about how the shop was founded. He told me that the shop in Kasamatsu had been going for 120 years and that his father took it over after the financial crisis in 1929. His father used to be a door-to-door salesman, selling bolts.

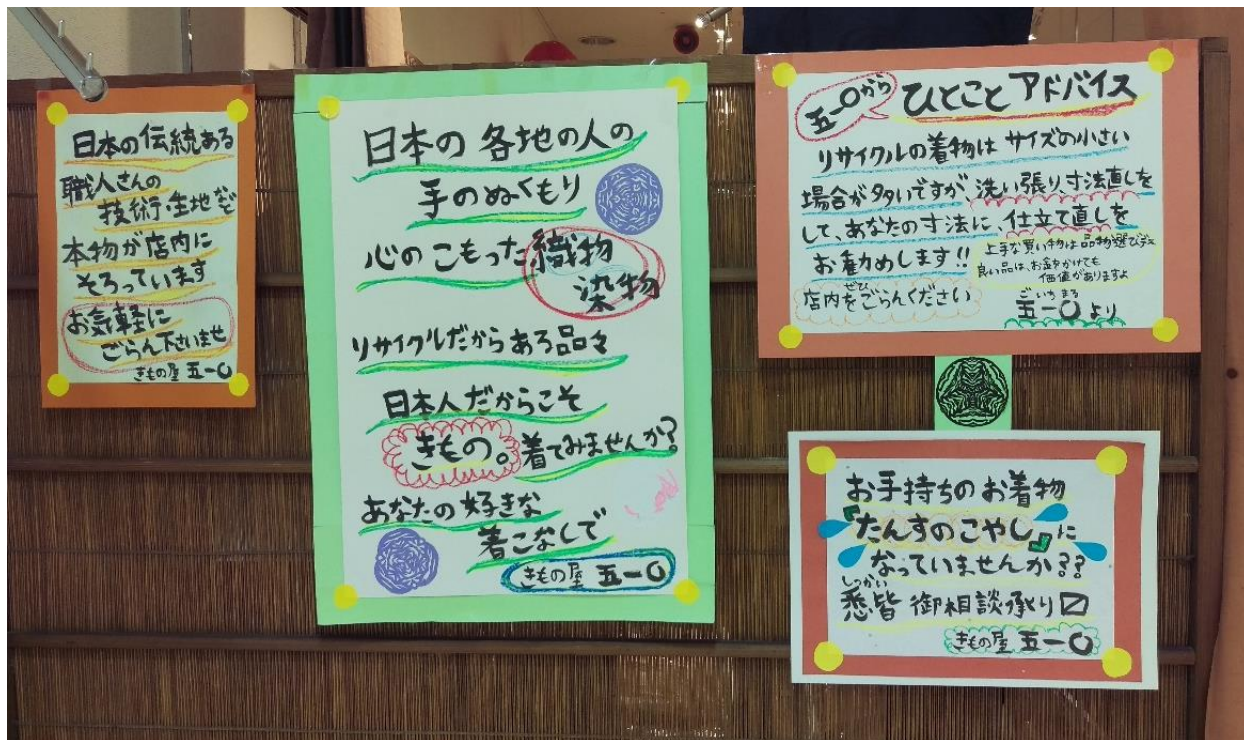
Goto-san senior was an avid enthusiast of economic theory, and he had a particular dislike for the salesmanship of kimono shops.

'The shops are to blame for the way things are, you know. They did such stupid things, such stupid things! Their sales techniques were so thoughtless, so stupid! It makes me so angry! And those *kitsuke* schools! They lure people in by saying their classes are free, and then you end up having to buy a kimono or having to pay to graduate! It's fraud! That's why we started doing some classes in Irinaka, so that people could learn without feeling pressured.'

I learnt that although Goto-san senior was the *kaicho* (head) of the shop, all the business was run by his son and his wife, and that he had all but retired from the shop's affairs. His health was ailing, and he did not make many appearances at the Toyota branch.

The Gotos showed every evidence of trying to make themselves friendly and approachable. I realised that Go-Ichi-Maru provided all the services a 'normal' *gofukuya* would provide: selling bolts, selling *komono* (both bolts and *komono* were new, not second-hand), *shitate* (tailoring), remaking to a new size, and re-dyeing among other things. They had acquired a reputation for

being reasonably priced, and there was a steady trickle of clients who were quite obviously regulars and had come specifically to see Goto-sensei.



Left: We have lots of authentic products made by craftsmen using traditional Japanese techniques. Feel free to look around!

Centre: Our goods are second-hand – they have all the warmth of hand-made weaving and dyeing, made with passion by craftsmen from all over Japan. Since you're Japanese, why don't you try wearing the kimono? Find your own style!

Right (top): A word of advice from Go-Ichi-Maru: Second-hand sizes are small. In many cases, we recommend unstitching the kimono and having it remade to your size. Savvy shopping involves choosing quality: it's worth spending a bit on good quality products! Please take a look around the shop.

Right (bottom): Are your kimono at home turning into 'tansu fertiliser'? Feel free to contact us²⁸.

²⁸ There is a particular word used on this sign, which is 悉皆 (*shikkai*). Originally a Buddhist term meaning 'everything' or 'all the parts', this word was used for Shikkaiya, now a largely defunct service provider which used to cater to all kimono needs, such as re-stitching, re-dyeing, washing and stain removal. I believe that Go-Ichi-Maru is using this word to suggest to their clientele that they can sell their kimono to Go-Ichi-Maru and still enjoy all the services normally provided by a 'proper' established kimono shop.

They had successfully combined the expertise and dignity of a kimono shop with the informality of a second-hand shop. The walls were peppered with friendly little notices, such as, ‘why don’t you give kimono a go?’

While she showed me how to work the till and other tasks, she instructed me on how to straighten all the piles of obi and the folded kimono.

‘You have to keep things nice and tidy,’ she said. ‘People are prejudiced about second-hand shops, and we have to show that things are done properly here, too. Like that they leave thinking that second-hand kimono shops aren’t so bad.’



In between dealing with customers, Goto-sensei never missed a chance to tell me about kimono, techniques and the industry. Intelligence and introspection characterised all the Gotos.

‘In the past, kimono used to be a woman’s wealth. You would send your daughter to her in-laws with kimono instead of money. Kimono could be exchanged for rice, so if she was ever really in trouble, she could still eat. You would prepare a full trousseau of kimono after your girl was born. I would say that, up until the early 1980s, it was common to have a trousseau that cost 10 million yen (£6580). Depending on which kimono the family included, the overall price would differ, but it was usually in that range. Now, people get married as *individuals*, not *households*.

Back then, you had to make sure that the families had roughly the same status, otherwise there's friction.'

In another lull between clients, the conversation would often turn to the industry itself. 'The industry is struggling. I reckon that it has shrunk to about a tenth of what it used to be. Craftspeople just can't sell. Department stores, they just don't have any good quality things. They borrow everything, and send everything back six months after. They're desperate to sell because they don't want to send things back and waste their money. It's terrible for the craftspeople. We buy everything, so I know it all. All the prices, all the colours, all the types. Everything. In the shop in Kasamatsu, we have three generations of customers, but it's so hard to sell anything. They tell us, 'our *tansu* are full! We have too many kimono!' So we started Go-Ichi-Maru in 2008 after hearing all this. Initially we got a lot of old things: a lot of red and purple. You can tell when a kimono was made from its colour. Red and purple are Meiji (1868-1912) or Taisho era (1912-1926). It was after the classes had been abolished, and people aspired to wear the colours of the upper classes. We also got lots of wool kimono from after the war, and lots of short *haori* overcoats. We knew that would never sell. But then things really took off, and sometimes we would get as many as 2000 items in a month, but really good things don't show up all that often. Lots of couples brings us kimono when they have to move house. They don't know what's good or bad, and they say that the kimono are too *jimi* (dull) and that they don't like them. They say it doesn't fit them. Kimono can be retailored to fit someone else though. They can be taken apart and reverted back into their original *tanmono* (bolt). You can't do that with Western clothes.'

On one occasion, she invited Sachiko and me for a coffee in the nearby hotel café.

'Second-hand kimono are a lot like Western clothes, in a way,' Goto-sensei told us. 'They cost a couple of thousand yen. People can buy them just the way they would Western clothes. Goto Gofukuya and Go-Ichi-Maru are completely different. They *have* to be different for the clients. In a way, it's easier at Go-Ichi-Maru. People feel like they can just walk in, and I don't have to stand on ceremony so much. The items are different, the relationship with the clients is different. Second hand kimono are popular right now, but how long is it going to go on for? Will Japan's *tansu* be completely emptied? Will the kimono go extinct? How long can we go on for?'

Some weeks later, Goto-sensei stopped coming to Go-Ichi-Maru in Toyota. Her husband's health was worsening, and she stayed at his side. I spent a few Saturdays with her replacement, and clients would come specifically asking to see her. Eventually, her Saturday slot on the 'advice

day' list (which was Monday and Friday for her son, Saturday for her) was scratched out. Afraid that I was too much of a burden for the family at what could only be a difficult time, I stopped going to Go-Ichi-Maru.



The Gotos, both parents and son, have seen a large slice of history for the kimono industry. They had witnessed the heyday of sales for formal kimono and profited from this. Goto-sensei in many ways embodied the ultimate 'okami-san', or senior female member of a kimono shop family. Their story was in many ways a sad one: they had witnessed, and been helpless to halt, the failing of their business in Kasamatsu, which led to them contemplating selling both the shop and the family home to which it was attached. Goto-san senior's health, too, was declining, bringing a halt to his

wife's involvement in the shop as well. Selling second-hand kimono was their way of trying to keep their business afloat for a little longer.

The business ethos of the Gotos was summed up by the words Goto-san senior said to me when I first met him:

‘We grit our teeth and carry on.’

Kawahiraya

The shop Kawahiraya takes a very different approach to survival strategies than Go-Ichi-Maru. A large kimono shop in Toyota's old district, Kawahiraya was quite possibly the largest of all the kimono shops in the area. It is, by all accounts, the go-to kimono shop for well-to-do middle-aged women in Toyota. In this respect, Kawahiraya is quite fortunate. Toyota is a wealthy city powered by the might of Toyota motors, and has its fair share of wealthy middle-aged women keen on having the right sort of kimono to wear for weddings and other occasions.

Everything about Kawahiraya is bright and glossy. There are many staff members, and all of the female staff members were wearing kimono. The shop itself is a four-storey affair with a photo studio attached, explicitly for the purposes of taking commemorative photos at special occasions which call for kimono to be worn, such as coming of age ceremonies, *shichi-go-san*²⁹ and family photos. Kawahiraya is in fact composed of three buildings in the immediate area, two of which are photo studios and therefore exclusively dedicated to taking pictures commemorating moments in ritual life where people like to take picture, like the coming of age ceremonies. These separate building are called ‘Sakura Kōbō’ (Sakura Workshop, named after the Sakura-machi ward of Toyota in which the shop is located), and one of them is dedicated to adults and the other to children.

My introduction to Kawahiraya came late in my fieldwork, through a participant in my research called Yasuko Ban. She was usually known as Ban-sensei since she was a *kitsuke* (kimono dressing) teacher. In addition to showing me her classroom (located in her family home) and her own fabulous collection of kimono, she had introduced me to several of her friends so that they

²⁹ *Shichi-go-san* is a ceremony for three- and seven-year-old girls and three- and five-year-old boys, held annually on or around November 15. Children are brought to nearby shrines, often wearing Japanese clothes, to pray for healthy growth and a prosperous future.

would show me their own collections. One of these was Ota-san, a neighbour and close friend of Ban-sensei. Aware of my wish to understand the industry better, she asked Ota-san, who was a customer at Kawahiraya, to put me in touch with Kawahiraya, which her friend did. As I stated in my Introduction, being properly introduced was very important in gaining access to field sites. With the notable exception of the open-minded Goto family, whenever I tried showing up unannounced, the experiment was a failure as the shop owners would decline when I asked for an interview. Ban-sensei was herself an unknown quantity for Kawahiraya, so she too had to be introduced. When the three of us finally went to Kawahiraya, both Ban-sensei and my own presence was justified by the presence of her friend.

The owner, Masato Itō, had made time for us on a warm day in May. We were invited to sit in Kawahiraya's beautiful back room and Itō-san gave us a run-down on his family history. Kawahiraya is 121 years old and, unusually in the business, the founding figure in Kawahiraya's history was a woman, his great-grandmother.

'We choose our *tonya* from the 2000 or so that exist in Kyoto, then we go and buy our wares there. Or we do it another way, which involves having an event here and having the *tonya* send us the craftsmen as well.'

Proudly, he showed us the most precious items in his shop. The most expensive bolts, the most precious in terms of their craft. These were not, strictly speaking, for sale, although there was





a price tag of over 1.7 million yen (£11,184) on the bolts. Itō-san had to fetch them from a special holding case. They were prestige items, symbols of the shop's wealth and good taste. As many kimono shop owners, wholesalers and craftspeople informed me, Itō-san told me that women used to wear the kimono much more than they do now for ceremonial occasions.

Itō-san, like the Goto family, was interested in the workings of the industry he belonged to. He showed me several *gyōkaishi* (industry-specific magazines and reports), including the most prominent, a magazine quite appropriately named Status Marketing. These magazines are newcomers to traditional industries like the kimono industry, and Status Marketing has been going since 1998. It is a glossy affair, complete with a sleek website³⁰, Twitter account and Facebook profile.

Kawahiraya, too, is glossy and sleek. There was no trace here of Kyorei's somewhat neutral shop interior and black uniforms or Go-Ichi-Maru's cheerful little handwritten notes. Unlike either Kyorei or Go-Ichi-Maru, Kawahiraya has a website³¹ and an updated blog. No expenses are spared on staff or appearance either, and the shop has an event set up almost every month.

³⁰ <http://status-marketing.com/> (retrieved 19/01/2017)

³¹ http://www.kawahiraya.co.jp/#sociable_anc (retrieved 19/01/2017)

Kawahiraya's key business is the *furisode*. An entire floor of the shop is dedicated to the *furisode*, and Kawahiraya's reputation no doubt ensures that many of the city's young women will come here to choose their coming of age ceremony kimono. Kawahiraya stocks everything, from rental kimono to expensive 'brand' kimono such as those from the famous Kyoto maker Chiso. As with Kyorei, once a shop enters the *furisode* business then that part of the business tends to take over at the expense of all the others. Like Kyorei and almost all other shops involved in *furisode*, the business is mostly rental, and Kawahiraya stocks a number of kimono that can be rented out to clients.

Unlike Kyorei, however, Kawahiraya's strategy seemed to be to have a finger in every pie. Rather than switch to second-hand kimono like Go-Ichi-Maru or limit their strategies to two client bases like Kyorei does with *furisode* customers and middle-aged women willing to buy expensive kimono, Kawahiraya's strategies was to do everything: they had expensive bespoke kimono but also cheaper polyester kimono in the 2000 (£13) to 10,000 (£66) yen range, summer *yukata* and rental kimono. They had also branched out beyond the world of *wafuku* (Japanese dress) and sold jewellery.

Kawahiraya also invested much more heavily in image than Kyorei and Go-Ichi-Maru. Staff escorted clients to and from the door, and the entire experience was geared towards making the customer feel special. There was even a special member's card called the Kawahiraya Tomo No Kai ('friends of Kawahiraya').

This card is very obviously targeted at middle-aged women who would tend to buy expensive kimono or see to preparations for ritual events in the family: the line 'you can use your card for presents for your daughter or your grandchildren!!' clearly hints at this, as does the formal wear (including black funeral wear) modelled on the marketing material. Customers choose the amount of money they put every month on the card (3000, 5000, 10,000 or 24,000 yen) and the customers then get 10% interest on their money. A customer paying in 5000 a month would then get a 60,000 yen (£394) bonus at the end of 12 months. This money can only be used in Kawahiraya and forces the customer to spend. The perks mentioned also rarely involve kimono themselves, and are usually free cleaning service, or free white tabi (kimono socks), for instance.

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川平屋 友の会 プリペイドカード



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5つのお得で
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お買い物に使えます!
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「川平屋 友の会プリペイドカード」限定!!
会員様特典&特別ご優待企画が満載!!

毎月
楽しい
お積立て
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選べる
4つの
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お得意様
限定
特典付

入会金無料
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オリジナル
10大特典付

お嬢様やお孫さんへのプレゼントやギフトカードにもOK!!

[abridged explanation]

VIP Golden Card – Friends of Kawahiraya Private Card

A fun investment every month – 4 different plans – member-only benefits – free to join and renew – 10 special offers for members

You can use your card for presents for your daughter or your grandchildren!!

Let your dreams take shape with these savings!

1. Put money on your card for 12 months – don't worry, your card will automatically renew for a second year
2. Every year, earn a 10% bonus on your money!
3. You can use up your saved money even before the card expires!
4. Choose from 4 different plans! Each member can have up to 2 cards.
5. 10 special offers for members – and lots more available!

Unlike with Kyorei's Nagasaka-san and Go-Ichi-Maru's Goto family, Kawahiraya's Itō-san did not reveal any anxiety to me about the future of the industry. Almost exclusively, other participants, such as Kyorei and Go-Ichi-Maru had been candid with me about the crisis in the industry, from Nagasaka-san's frankness to Kanamaru-sensei's anxiety over whether his daughter could make a living with his family's craft. Yet Kawahiraya expressed none of that doubt.

It is possible, of course, that Kawahiraya is doing very well and as such does not need to express doubt. But I found it hard to believe that the crisis could have spared them completely. But Kawahiraya is a kimono shop that has found itself selling things that are not related to the industry. Things like jewellery, trips to Kyoto and commemorative photographs. Kawahiraya offered loyalty cards, carefully calculated discounts and gift sets, all designed to entice and keep customers.

Kawahiraya was engaged in the careful balancing act of preserving the glamour of a prestigious post-war kimono shop with the wealth of pre-1990s Japan, but with all the trappings of modern society, like an online presence, a special member's card, and sparkly rental *furisode*. Kawahiraya displayed many of the tactics of prestigious kimono shops, such as taking their customers on trips, putting on shows and events, bringing in non-related specialists from fields as far away as physiotherapy or ophthalmology. Oddly enough, Kawahiraya would quite regularly invite such medical specialists on the basis of an agreement with the specialists, usually to offer some kind of discount. The hope, doubtless, was to get customers to buy something kimono-related at the same time.

With Kawahiraya, I realised, it was also about selling an image as well as selling kimono. It was about glamour and selling the 'Kawahiraya experience'. It was about selling status as a Kawahiraya customer. But that did not stop the rumours from flying. Many participants saw Kawahiraya as a giant with feet of clay.

'How they make their money I have no idea,' one participant told me. 'Those three big buildings? Imagine the loans they took out!'

I could not ascertain for certain whether Kawahiraya's gamble had worked. Part of the shop's goal was to make sure that it looked as though they were thriving. In the end, however, their involvement in as many areas as possible spoke for itself: it was their survival strategy. They had simply glossed over the grit with glamour.

In this chapter, I have given an overview of how the kimono industry is structured, how the chain of distribution works, and the manner in which the kimono industry is floundering in the 21st century. I have shown how the material qualities of the kimono structure how the industry is set up, from the division of labour to the chain of distribution, as well as the method of selling kimono as *tanmono* bolts. I have shown how this division of labour is set up to extract maximum value and how the industry cashed in on the formalisation of the kimono and its use in ceremonial and ritual life. The kimono industry has a very strong hand in shaping kimono culture in the 20th century, something which is almost never pointed out in literature on the kimono and which hints at the deep interconnection between the creation of ‘traditional’ culture and economic activity. In addition to society-wide socio-economic factors, the industry actively encouraged the increasing formalisation of the kimono, and to do so they created a shield of opacity around the workings of the industry, and they obtained a knowledge monopoly over the kimono.

This method has parallels with other industries in Japan, such as the funeral and marriage industry, which have also taken over knowledge that used to be the domain of family life in early 20th century Japan, but also with other aspects of economic life that may initially appear to have nothing in common, such as financial markets. Finally, I also showed how the kimono industry’s salesmanship and marketing strategies lost them the trust of their customers, and how their single-item focus on the formal kimono failed to anticipate the decline of formal kimono in contemporary Japan. As a result, the industry is reduced to finding the best survival strategy to stay in business a little while longer.

In the next chapter, I turn my attention to a shop called Azumaya, which, against all the odds, appears to not only be surviving, but thriving. The owner of this shop takes a radical approach: marketing the kimono as fashion and carving out a space in the industry for a new version of kimono culture: the fashion kimono lifestyle.

Chapter 4: Azumaya: the ‘nail that stuck up so far that no one could hammer it down’



With summer fast approaching, the display in Azumaya’s window has changed to reflect their summer wares: *yukata*, light summer kimono, are now in pride of place. Azumaya is, at first glance, a rather unassuming place. A shop front with kimono in the window and a cotton plant by way of mascot by the door. But unassuming is in fact the idea – the shop is designed to look ordinary and unpretentious in order to evoke the opposite of a typical kimono shop. It is unassuming by design.

Azumaya sells mostly *fudangi* kimono which are usually not worn for ceremonial occasions such as graduation ceremonies. Azumaya also sells some formal kimono, but these are not usually to be found in the shop window. The shop window itself contrasts with other kimono shop types such as the relatively neutral displays of chain kimono shops in shopping centres, the flashy facades of shops specialised in coming of age ceremonies, covered in pictures of models in *furisode* kimono, or the traditional kimono shop with somewhat forbidding facades.



I was to find out later that Shibakawa-san had taken down the sign that said ‘luxury kimono’ on the outside wall of the shop. The top of the list of goods and services on the wall now reads *fudangi* or ‘casual kimono,’ and ‘formal kimono’ (*reisō kimono*) are relegated to second place.

My introduction to Azumaya came through Kyoko, who works part-time at Azumaya mainly doing physical work such as washing and ironing. I had met Kyoko quite by chance through Junko Kusunoki in Toyota. Kyoko is not simply a part-time worker, however. She is a childhood friend of the owner, Yoshihide Shibakawa. Her self-assurance, magnetic personality and sharp mind make her an asset to Azumaya well beyond the work she provides behind the scenes. Her sense of authority and ownership came through when she assured me that there was no problem in my staying a whole day at Azumaya. Her word was enough. This intrigued me right off the bat – for a part-time worker to have quite such authority suggested that Azumaya functioned in a rather different way than shops I had seen up until then, where relationships were highly hierarchical and part-time workers would have no such authority.

Aware of my interest in kimono shops and no doubt eager to introduce her unusual kimono shop to me, Kyoko brought me to Azumaya for a first meeting with Shibakawa-san in mid-December 2015.

‘You’ll see when we go there,’ she had told me. ‘There aren’t many places like my shop. Everyone wears kimono every day.’

In most kimono shops I had visited, nobody wore kimono. Occasionally the Okami-san (the owner, or the wife or mother of the owner) might, but it was definitely not expected of everyone, and especially not of the male workers.

‘For the Shibakawa family, the kimono is both lifestyle *and* work, you see. The Okami-san has her sleeves tailored in the *naginata* (lance) style, so they don’t get in the way. Sometimes she keeps them in place with elastic bands. They’re working in a shop but the house is attached to the shop, so they’re cooking, fetching the kids from school... Everyone rides a bike, too.’

‘Really? A bike? In kimono?’ I couldn’t help but interrupt, sceptical.

‘Really!’ she grinned, amused at my disbelief. ‘You’ll see.’

Kyoko first took me to visit Azumaya after I had joined a Kimono de Jack (KdJ) meeting³². Azumaya is linked to KdJ since Yoshihide Shibakawa is technically the leader of the Aichi KdJ division. Kimono de Jack, as discussed in Chapter 1, is a gathering of people who enjoy wearing the kimono, the idea being that they ‘highjack’ a place by filling it with people dressed in kimono, and thus give others the wish to wear them as well. Venues have to be well-chosen since they have to be free and the KdJ community cannot get too much in the way of other visitors.

I had spent the day with Kyoko, her husband Takashi, and about ten different members of Kimono de Jack, and we had inspected the site of a KdJ gathering to take place in mid-January 2016. After the meeting was over we descended upon Azumaya, which was, as I was to find out later, quite a normal thing for them to do. Azumaya is open late and has something of an open-door policy.

As I stepped inside Azumaya, I immediately noticed how different Azumaya was from all the shops I had been to up until then, and it wasn’t simply that I had been conditioned by Kyoko to expect something different. For starters, there were a lot of people, sitting or standing around, relaxed, some looking at the wares, others chatting and joking with each other. They were not so much customers as visitors and friends. The shop had a communal feel, and although it wasn’t big there was space for people and lots of chairs to sit. Everyone seemed to know each other.

³² Kimono de Jack is a group that meets six times a year in a pre-arranged location to ‘highjack’ it by wearing kimono as a group. The idea is that by meeting as a group, people will not feel so shy about wearing the kimono and that it might give others the wish to wear the kimono too.

Shibakawa-san was in the centre of the group, sitting on a chair and chatting. He had spotted me well before I entered the shop and I could see that he was indeed a little nervous. Kyoko quickly thawed whatever anxiety he might have been feeling when she introduced me, and with very little prompting, he began to speak to me about the industry and his own personal experience and his take on marketing and salesmanship.

‘I tell things the way they are,’ he said, echoing what Takaharu Goto had told me a month prior. ‘I doubt anyone will tell you the truth the way I will. All *gofukuya* are in trouble. Our generation is at a *katoki* (crossroads), in all areas of the industry. People in their 40s are rare in the industry, but we’re in a good position. We know all the traditional stuff *and* we have new ideas, too. In the past, customers were loyal to a shop because they liked the people there. Now, people are loyal to a shop because they like the brand. But with the kimono, if people aren’t there to explain how it works and why it’s special, customers won’t understand. They say that a kimono shop is finally established as a *gofukuya* after a hundred years, so we’ve got a way to go! But having an old shop can make the owners spoiled. Everyone suffered once the Bubble burst. Kimono are *shikohin* (luxury goods). They’re not necessary. 99.9% of people wear Western clothes. Here in my shop, the whole family wears kimono, unlike all the other shops. I want to brand the kimono, just like Western clothes.’

I asked him whether he thought people had started wearing the kimono again recently.

‘There’s been an increase. There’s undeniably an appeal to Japanese clothes so it’s very important to give people the opportunity. If people are in a group it’s much easier for them to wear it. People who didn’t have the courage to express themselves can do so when they wear a kimono. They find their path. It was only about 5 years ago that men started wearing kimono again. Before, if you were a man and you wore a kimono, you were either a tea ceremony practitioner or involved with the *yakuza*! Up until ten years ago, old people still wore the kimono. Now they find it too hard and too tiring, so you don’t see it so much anymore. And that’s the thing – the ordinary has become *natsukashii* (nostalgic).’

I asked Shibakawa-san whether he thought that the kimono might in fact die out.

‘I think that the time has come for us small shops. We can tell people about how great the kimono is. It’s not just about business. We’ve all understood just how bad our situation is. And it takes a long time to understand the world of kimono. It took me 20 years. Like Swiss watches, craftspeople take lots of time over one tiny thing. It’s hard for people to just walk into a kimono

shop. It's scary, off-putting, snobbish. I use the Internet and my YouStream account to 'sell *anshin*' (reassurance) to people. Some of the clients who come to the shop do so because they have watched my videos. That's not something that the industry is used to doing – they're used to hiding their secrets. Me? I don't want to sell expensive things. I want to sell things that people *like*! Up until now, shops thought of themselves as *erai* (superior). They would look down on young people and say things like "you wouldn't be able to afford it anyway". I want to be the opposite of that. I want my shop to be friendly, and easy to just pop into to have a look. A lot of shops went bust after the Bubble burst. Except for chains and family-owned shops. They were terrible at branding themselves. Branding now would be very good. It could help save techniques from dying out. You need both marketing and design, just like Louis Vuitton.'

I asked him about the state of the industry as a whole.

'You know, I tell young people looking to get into this business not to get into it. *I'm* all right: this here is my home, I'm with my family and I don't have any full-time staff. I buy direct, my clients are loyal, and I can sell things as cheaply as possible. I'm surrounded by friends. There was a time when I was worried about the future of my business, but not now,' he said. 'You know the expression "the nail that sticks up gets hammered down"? Well I'm the nail that stuck up so far that nobody could hammer me down!'

And looking around the shop, I could well believe him. By now I had experienced Shibakawa-san's unusual charisma: a kind of self-deprecating, wry humour combined with a sense of real pride in what he was doing. Serious about kimono but laid-back, fun and with a shot of self-aware silliness, Shibakawa-san and also his mother, had generated a relatable, easy-going atmosphere in their business, making Azumaya 'the real deal' in the eyes of their customers. Shibakawa-san had gained a reputation for his enthusiasm and love of kimono, and his openness about the industry. The combination of pride in his work, humility and personable nature had established him as an ally to the customer and a champion of the kimono as fashion.

Possibly the most striking thing about Azumaya is the self-reflective nature of Shibakawa-san's discourse and the way his narrative about the kimono, retail and identity permeates his shop and even his identity. This is not unique to Shibakawa-san – many of the shop owners I spoke to, including Nagasaka-san and the Goto family, were thinking in some way about how the kimono industry worked and their place in the industry, but what set Shibakawa-san apart was his sense of

mission. His sense of himself in the world and his way of business were shot through with a sense that his mission was to get Japanese people to see the kimono differently: as something to enjoy like any other consumer item rather than only as formal wear. Whilst he has respect for formal wear, he nonetheless sticks to the established kimono canon, he has forged a reputation for himself as *the* purveyor of cotton *fudangi* kimono and other fashionable kimono on the casual end of the spectrum, and he has managed to do so in spite of owning a small-scale shop in rural Aichi prefecture. Shibakawa-san has re-created his shop, his interactions with his customers, his image and even his own identity around a meta-narrative about what a kimono shop *ought* to be and how he and his family could live up to his own image: in his view, he is ‘the nail that could not be hammered down’, not by the world of Western clothes and not by the rest of the ‘traditional’ kimono industry.

But Azumaya was not always as it is now. Shibakawa-san’s father did not simply hand Azumaya in its current shape to his son. Rather, Azumaya as it is now is a reflection of Shibakawa-san’s soul-searching, his quest for a way to reconcile what he thought a kimono shop should be with his experience of what it actually was.

‘I was one of the last to be trained in a traditional way, as an apprentice. I went straight into it from high school, aged 18,’ he said. ‘I did 5 years of training. It was very strict, for the first year all I did was cleaning, odd-jobs and rolling *tanmono* (bolts). I got very good at that!’ he laughed. ‘They would test you. My boss would yell at me, “don’t bother showing up tomorrow!” Of course, I would still have to show up, someone would be sent to drag me in by the ear if I didn’t! They do it to toughen you up. Otherwise you wouldn’t survive in an industry this tough.’ He paused. ‘At least, I need to think of it that way! It was good for me. My boss was 48 when I did my training. I’m in my 40s now, and I would like to do the same thing.’

However difficult it might have been, I could tell that he was proud of his apprenticeship. I asked him what it was like to take over the family business.

‘Well you can’t really run away from it,’ he said, half-joking. ‘It reflects badly on the family, so if you’re going to run, do it early! We have a saying: the founder of the business, the grandfather, does all the hard work and sets up things properly. The second family head lives off his father’s success and the third destroys the business. I’m the third.’ He laughed. ‘Years ago, after I took over from my father, I didn’t really care about the kimono. I didn’t wear it, I didn’t actually like it. Now, when I think of Oshima pongee, for example, to me it’s like the Ferrari of

kimono! And frankly, it hurts to sell it for just 300,000 yen after all the work the craftspeople put in. If someone came in here wanting an Oshima with no idea of the work that went into it, I wouldn't sell it to them. But I'll admit that back in the day, I didn't understand the value of an Oshima. I was interested in money, so I would have sold it. I didn't really like kimono back then. But not now. I wouldn't sell it to them now.'

Over the months, I got to know Shibakawa-san and his family. Through my conversation with him and with Kyoko, who had observed his transformation in the last 10 years, I came to understand that he had experienced a kind of moral identity crisis: he had felt it was immoral to try and get a customer to pay 300,000 yen for something that he himself did not like. For several years, he had felt trapped. After all, he had thought that there was no other way for a kimono shop to be. One day someone told him that they would never buy a kimono from a shop owner who doesn't wear them, and as Shibakawa-san tells it, that was a watershed moment for him. He knew the danger that Azumaya and the kimono industry were in. Endeavouring to both reconcile his moral quandary about his business and search for ways to keep his head above the water, Shibakawa-san started wearing the kimono. Religiously, in fact. Now he claims that he no longer wears Western clothes at all.

That, it seems, is what changed Shibakawa-san completely.

'Wearing it every day, that's how I came to really love it. Before that, I didn't really care. They really are amazing clothes. I can really see why people in the past chose to make them this way. To me, it's the number one fashion in the world. There's lots of subtleties to master, but that's only because people have forgotten what used to be common knowledge. It's such a recent change, when you think about it. It was only 70 years ago that people really stopped wearing the kimono. Things have changed really fast, and the industry hasn't kept up.'

This moment of getting to know the kimono for himself had a profound impact on Shibakawa-san's life and his work. David Wright has argued that, in the bookselling trade, love and enthusiasm for books is a key means for one book shop to secure a 'competitive advantage' over another (Wright 2005: 308). I believe that Shibakawa-san's enthusiasm for kimono has indeed given him a competitive edge, but that this was almost an accidental side-effect of something that was happening on a more fundamental level: the everyday practice of wearing a kimono reformed Shibakawa-san's own personal *habitus*, in the sense that he changed his bodily practices to accommodate the new type of clothing. As he got to know the kimono on a personal level, his

personal sense of self merged with his role as a kimono retailer. It has been held in literature on Japan that the Japanese are masters of the relational, multifaceted, situational self, clearly demarcating social role and private self (see Doi 1973, Hendry 1986 and Lebra 1976). But I would argue that in the case of Shibakawa-san, he has merged role and self. Wright notes that ‘over-identification’ with products can impact, even endanger, book shop workers’ sense of self (Wright 2005: 304), but my participant observation at Azumaya led me to understand that Shibakawa-san had chosen to remove that barrier between work and self completely. His enthusiasm and desire to transmit his knowledge about the kimono are both a sales patten and a kind of personal crusade, and part of this involves giving his customers, who are as we shall also see key co-creators of his narrative, much greater access to himself and his personal life than an ordinary shopkeeper would. In the first part of this chapter, I explore how generating a new type of kimono shop that offers the kimono as a fashion item coincided with Shibakawa-san reinventing himself as a person. In this way, the mission to reinvent the industry was intertwined with a journey of self-discovery for Shibakawa-san and a personal reinvention of self. Shibakawa-san involves his customers in the creation of a kind of ‘discourse-in-action’ that extends beyond the realm of words and the representational but is also demonstrated through actions and embodied knowledge and practice.

Borrowing from literature on subcultures and alternative retailing, I demonstrate how Shibakawa-san employs ‘oppositional discourse’ to distinguish Azumaya from both the world of *yōfuku* (Western clothes) fashion *and* from traditionalist kimono shops that offer mainly formal fashion kimono. I go one step further to argue that Azumaya *needs* these opposing forces in order to establish a subculture *within* a subculture: the kimono industry itself can be seen as a subculture, but within that Azumaya and its community of customers are a further smaller subculture. Like any alternative culture, this subculture needs a mainstream to which it can oppose itself. In Azumaya’s case this is both the world of Western clothes and the realm of expensive, formal kimono. I will examine how crafting this opposition is three things: a subculture-building exercise, a quest for self-reinvention and a strategy for survival in a world where kimono are difficult to sell. I also suggest that, underlying the oppositional discourse towards Western clothes, there is an ambiguous relationship to modernity, capitalism and Westernisation. Creating this oppositional discourse, which is itself at times ambiguous, hints at the multi-faceted relationship between mainstream and alternative cultures, but also at the complex relationship to modernity and Westernisation in Japanese culture.

In the second part of this chapter, I go on to explore the project of place-making in the context of the shop Azumaya. Azumaya as a space is crafted in such a way that it is more than a shop: it is the 'home', both physical and metaphysical, of a community of practice, knowledge and consumption. The oppositional discourse I explore in the following section goes some way towards crafting this shop-as-home, but I argue that the way customers engage with Azumaya as a home-like environment points to a nostalgia or longing for home and community that is characteristic not just of Japan, but of industrialised nations more generally. Moving away from interpretations of nostalgia and longing that are specific to Japan, I argue that Azumaya is an expression of the experience-based economy that characterises industrialised nations in the present day, with a 'return' to the handmade, the 'authentic' and the local.

1. Oppositional discourse: if I am the nail, who is the hammer?

Opposition to Western clothes

The central question in any academic work on consumption is this: why do people consume? (Campbell in Ekström, K. M. and Brembeck 2004: 27). Anthropologists have been trying to answer this question ever since consumption became a major topic for discussion in the discipline. While initially focused on refuting the rational choice theory of the selection of goods that was a core part of economic theory in the 1970s and 80s (Douglas and Isherwood 1996(1979), McCracken 1988), later anthropologists came to see consumption as a key part of the construction of self and identity. Daniel Miller in particular has written extensively on the topic (See Miller 1987, Miller 1995 and Miller 2012). In fact, Yoshihide Shibakawa was also forced to ask himself this question but in relation to his business: why do people consume kimono? And more importantly, what will it take for people to consume *my* kimono? Shibakawa-san was a teenager in high school when he decided to take over the family kimono shop. His older brother made it clear that he did not want to take over, and Shibakawa-san reluctantly took his brother's place. Immediately after graduating from high school, Shibakawa-san was an apprentice for five years in a different kimono shop. When Shibakawa-san returned, he had little enthusiasm for what would be his life's work. His father's generation had done well for themselves: theirs was the heyday of the formal kimono (see Chapter 2) and they had made plenty of money, but for Shibakawa-san in the 1990s, falling sales and a decrease in customers was a reality. What had worked for his father no longer worked for him, and this triggered a search for a way to reinvent both his business and himself.

In *The Subculture Reader*, Ken Gelder writes that, 'as modernity consolidated itself, subcultures were increasingly represented (by themselves and by others) in opposition to mass culture and to massification' (Gelder 2005: 6). Louise Crewe calls this type of narrative 'oppositional discourse' in her analysis of alternative retailers (Crewe 2003). She found that alternative retailers portrayed 'the world and work of retro retailing and consumption as being in opposition to an imagined, homogenized world of mainstream retailing' (Crewe 2003: 64). Shibakawa-san, too, develops the narrative of Azumaya as opposed to two forces: firstly, the world of mainstream *yōfuku* (Western clothes) retail, as with the alternative retailers. This idea of oppositional discourse is key to crafting not simply Azumaya's image, but the shop itself and its

role within the world of fashion and Japanese society at large. Further, as with many subcultures that revolve around consumption (what Schouten and McAlexander (1995) refer to as ‘subcultures of consumption’), it is not just retailers who build oppositional discourse, but consumers, too, are active co-creators of the subculture discourse. As Andrew Bowsher wrote in his DPhil thesis on the independent music scene in Austin, Texas, ‘part of the desirable construct of shopping space (independent, characterful, engaging staff and products) is made through oppositional contrasts with other related shopping sites (corporate chains, impersonal, bland)’ (Bowsher 2014: 208). This discourse needs something to be opposed to, which is usually the mainstream. In the case of music, for instance, alternative music is opposed to ‘mainstream’. Ryan Moore has explored this phenomenon in the case of the alternative rock subculture in San Diego. He writes, ‘the San Diego music scene was connected to a larger alternative rock subculture that operates with a ‘small is beautiful’ philosophy advocating authenticity and sincerity. Alternative rock subcultures have defined themselves in terms of commercial independence and autonomy from mainstream culture’ (Moore 2005: 236). Shibakawa-san defines his business and his community of customers against the mass-produced culture of Western clothes on the one hand and against the rest of the kimono industry on the other. While some wares in kimono shops can be mass-produced, many (such as woven obi and dyed kimono) cannot be, and they are the product of a traditional industry in which mechanisation is still relatively limited³³. The wares of kimono retailers simply cannot be mass-produced, which almost by default opposes them to mass-produced retail. Shibakawa-san is at pains to stress the qualities of the craft that goes into making kimono and obi, the *sugoi gijutsu* (amazing techniques) that are needed to make kimono. The shop’s small scale enables Shibakawa-san to vet his products closely, choosing them personally, buying them rather than borrowing them from wholesalers. In many cases, Shibakawa-san knows the craftspeople personally, either having visited their workshops or by establishing close personal ties with them. In August 2016, I spent a day in Azumaya during which a craftsman from Kyoto, unannounced, paid Azumaya a visit. The craftsman had brought his latest wares and offered them for inspection. The entire family was summoned from their various duties. The Okami-san called for Kyoko (standing at the right-hand side in the photo below, wearing blue) to join them. Kyoko usually works on the second floor of the building, washing and ironing bolts of fabric. She is the only one in the shop to wear Western

³³ While many looms are mechanised (and not handlooms) they may still operate with a punch card system or with floppy disks.

clothes. Unlike the Shibakawa family, Kyoko does not wear kimono as work clothes. Kyoko's opinion on which kimono and obi to buy was clearly highly valued, and what she said tended to clinch whether or not Azumaya would make a purchase.



Shibakawa-san's father (in the dotted white kimono and brown *hakama*) examined the selection closely, occasionally offering advice. The Okami-san, Shibakawa-san and Kyoko were the true decision-makers, however. Shibakawa-san's wife (in the background), a shy, rather retiring woman, did not venture an opinion. The entire interaction was rather informal, and it was clear that everyone was on good terms. Goods to buy and goods to reject were decided upon quickly, although Shibakawa-san was always careful to check what the kimono would look like by draping it around his own body, something I had never seen a male kimono shop owner do. The occasion was, as often the case in Azumaya, one in which to exchange jokes and banter with people in the extended network, in this case the Kyoto craftsman, reinforcing bonds.



Azumaya's philosophy of handpicking products and having direct social bonds with craftspeople happens to be greatly at odds with the way mass consumption normally works in terms of how people pick clothes, usually in a shop where clothes are not tailor-made and are not made by craftspeople. And this is no accident: Shibakawa-san has chosen his shop to be this way, breaking with the manner his father ran the shop and against the norms of kimono shop running generally. The discourse of Azumaya is all about the *specificity* of the product: what are its unique characteristics? How was it made? By whom was it made? The products are, one could argue, individuals, almost decommodified in the sense Kopytoff employed to signify an object being singularised and removed from the world of exchangeable objects (Kopytoff in Appadurai 1986: 76), even though they are still very much commodities. Shibakawa-san feels as though he has a genuine relation to his products not just because he knows about them, but because he has met and he knows the owner of the pair of hands who made them. Returning however to the notion of authenticity, the Shibakawas, essentially, become the bridge between the craftspeople and the consumers, a link which in mass produced clothes cannot be established. The social bonds linking craftspeople and Azumaya are made clear to the consumer – in fact, the consumers want to know. Charles Lindholm writes that modern life is characterised by a desire for authenticity, often by consuming 'authentic' products (Lindholm 2008: 1), particularly since consumers instinctively sense that what they consume, in a sense, goes a long way to making them who they are. As such, Azumaya is established as the locus of authenticity, located in the products themselves but also in the Shibakawas' role as the bridge between the craftsperson and the wearer. The discourse in Azumaya, however, is one of authentic engagement with the product, the Shibakawa family and Azumaya itself.

It might seem that this oppositional discourse against Western clothes and the mass consumer system to which they belong may seem relatively subtle, suggested to the customer rather than explicitly stated. At times, Shibakawa-san was more explicit in his opposition to Western clothes. He once told me how 'sad and depressing' he found *yōfuku* clothing: 'if you sit in the train, you see everyone wearing the same colours. It's all dark blue, black and grey. It's so dull. With kimono you have so much choice, so much colour. Japanese people used to be so fashionable and colourful, but not now with *yōfuku*.' Shibakawa-san doubts, then, the ability of people to fully express themselves with mass-produced *yōfuku*. Although there are phenomenal quantities of it, Western clothing can only offer 'sameness' and 'dullness'. Referring to Theodor

W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1940s), Gelder states that ‘the primary logic of mass culture’ is the way it ‘homogenizes, rationalizes and standardizes cultural production and consumption, wiping away “individuality” in the process’ (*ibid*). This analysis of the homogenising effects of mass culture as an effect of 20th century modernity is, of course, well-established. Appadurai argued that the argument whereby modernity leads to cultural homogenization across the globe hinges on the dual forces of Americanization and ‘commoditization’ (Appadurai 1990: 295). Appadurai does not deny that the forces of globalization, capitalism and modernisation tend to homogenise culture. Instead he stresses that this homogenization is subject to a process of indigenisation and that each culture adapts elements of global culture (i.e. capitalist, American, consumerist) (Appadurai 1990). Richard Wilk offers an alternative theory to the homogenizing effect of global ‘mass’ culture: instead of looking at the way local cultures adapt to global culture, through his example of beauty pageants in Belize he argues that ‘global systems of common difference’ *organize* diversity: ‘while different cultures continue to be quite distinct and varied, they are becoming different in very uniform ways’ (Wilk in Miller 1995: 118).

While these interpretations may be valid, in some cases it may be that our research participants themselves keenly feel the effect of mass consumption and Americanization as alienating forces that homogenise culture, generating either a sense of loss or a sense of ambivalence towards modernity. A great deal of literature on Japan portrays Japan as having a unique struggle in coming to terms with modernity and Americanisation (see Jansen and Bellah 1982, Ivy 1995, Clammer 1995, Clammer in Hay and Marsh 1999, Harootunian 2000). The crux of many of these arguments revolves around the speed with which Japan became a modern nation state, and that this speed led to a sense of loss and anxiety around cultural forms that predated the modernisation of Japanese society.

Shibakawa-san displays a certain tension towards modernity. Whilst he embraces everything that modernity has to offer in terms of discourses on fashion and self-expression, not to mention all the technological trappings of 21st century life, he simultaneously yearns for a time when the kimono was worn by everyone in Japan. As Shibakawa-san said in the vignette at the beginning of this chapter, ‘people have forgotten what used to be common knowledge. It’s such a recent change, when you think about it. It was only 70 years ago that people really stopped wearing the kimono’. If we take Wilk’s theory of ‘global systems of common difference’ on board, then Shibakawa-san has to express the ‘difference’ of his shop through channels that contemporary

Japanese people, who are steeped in global consumer culture, will understand. In this sense, Shibakawa-san's sometimes seemingly contradictory and ambiguous discourse about modern life in Japan is not entirely unexpected.

I would argue that this struggle in coming to terms with modernity is not specific to Japan, nor is it peculiar to non-Western countries. Whilst in much of the literature the West is referred to as a monolithic entity, countries that are part of 'the West', such as France, have themselves struggled with the homogenising effect of modernity and capitalism. Richard Kuisel, for instance, has explored the ambivalence of French people towards American culture in the post-war period. Struggling against Americanisation (particularly in the shape of Coca-Cola) was a way to stand up for French culture and civilisation, but this anti-Americanism was tempered with fascination and admiration (Kuisel 1993).

Shibakawa-san is, in a sense, opposed to Japan's 'indigenised' mass culture when it comes to clothing, and what he dislikes in particular is his perceived homogeneity of clothing culture in Japan. In a sense, it has to be since having an 'opposition' (i.e. the 'boring sameness' of Western clothes as he puts it) enables him to establish his wares as different – and better. In this sense, Shibakawa-san's discourse is one of taste and aesthetics that positions his wares as more capable of fully expressing good taste than the Western clothes available to Japanese people. A similar phenomenon would be that of 'Slow Food', started by Carlo Petrini in response to the opening of a MacDonaldis near the Spanish Steps in Rome in 1989 (Wilk 2006). While seeking ways to build connections between producers and consumers, the Slow Food movement also articulates a discourse about the right kind of taste in food. In addition, many of the locally produced foods proposed by the Slow Food movement tend to be more expensive than industrially produced food items in supermarkets, and thus makes the Slow Food movement far more available to wealthier social classes³⁴.

Taking a step back from this discourse to analyse it anthropologically, it is of course not automatically the case that 'sameness' entails a lack of individuality and self-expression. In their work of the global trend of wearing blue jeans, Daniel Miller and Sophie Woodward identify that sameness with others and intense individuality cohabit within the very materiality of the jeans themselves: 'the paradox was that at the very time when blue jeans were becoming the global ecumene of clothing, they were simultaneously becoming the most developed expression of

³⁴ <https://pollan.blogs.nytimes.com/2006/05/11/why-eating-well-is-elitist/> (retrieved 06/04/2018).

specific individuality' (Miller and Woodward 2011: 4). This individuality is expressed materially because of the jeans' ability to become moulded and shaped by the body of the wearer, while simultaneously being a global clothing trend that, one could argue, is an expression of sameness. Louise Crewe notes that alternative shops are also communities of knowledge in which retailers have 'elite' knowledge and see their goods and pure and authentic (Crewe 2003: 66-7). In this way, alternative retailers tend to carve out enclaves of knowledge and belonging, creating a sometimes elitist set of aesthetics and taste, something that can come at the cost of excluding segments of society that do not adhere to their sense of aesthetics. In the case of Azumaya, Shibakawa-san goes to great lengths to make his business welcoming to all-comers, but inevitably a core group of loyal customers has formed and created their own ethos and community, with its boundaries and insider knowledge.

In much the same way that French people are not entirely opposed to mass culture in Kuisel's analysis, Shibakawa-san is not categorically opposed to mass culture. Rather, he is ambivalent. When he describes the kimono and its fashionable nature, he uses the terminology of the global fashion industry such as 'individuality', 'self-expression', 'stylish' or 'preferences' – terms that are at odds with the kimono canon in Japan that has much more to do with ceremony, ritual and cultural capital than it does with fashion preference. Azumaya's wares, in contrast, are cast as fashionable vehicles of self-expression: referred to in terms that emphasise self-expression such as *shumi* (preferences), *konomi* (likes), *oshare* (style) *jibunrashisa* (being oneself) and *kosei* (individuality). Azumaya maintains a strong presence on social media through Facebook and Twitter, and this is a post from the shop Facebook profile in February 2017:



This Facebook post is a picture of men's *kakuobi* (narrower and longer than women's obi) and the post reads:

[Stylish Kakuobi for Men] There are more and more *Kimono Danshi* (kimono-wearing men), and what's more they're wearing it for fashion. The ultimate individuality. Inspiration for men.

These terms belong to a modern, Westernised discourse on fashion. Azumaya in fact repeatedly makes use of the word fashion to anchor the kimono as a viable, equally fashionable alternative to Western clothes. This is why 'oppositional discourse' only goes some way to explaining Azumaya's narrative: kimono are cast as different and novel compared to Western clothes and in a sense Azumaya is *competing* with the Western clothing market in a David and Goliath type scenario which is necessary in order to establish subculture capital. After all, the David and Goliath scenario is only special because Goliath is bigger and stronger than David. In a similar fashion, Azumaya and the kimono industry (David) are special because the Western clothing retail industry (Goliath) is so much more powerful. However, by borrowing from the

language of Western clothing marketing (such as *'kosei'* and *'fashion'*) Shibakawa-san is anchoring his shop in something that is quite similar to a Western clothing shop and therefore familiar for his customer. Shibakawa-san also needs to be careful in articulating his discourse, since an overly critical outlook on Western clothes may alienate customers who enjoy Western fashion as much as or even more than kimono. More importantly, perhaps, this association with the concepts of fashion and self-expression more typically in association with Western clothing is important in the construction of Shibakawa-san's second oppositional discourse, this time towards *'traditional'* kimono shops that sell expensive kimono for ceremonial purposes. He accuses them of having artificially removed kimono from the world of fashion and argues that, on the contrary, kimono were always all about fashion. He sees kimono as *'saiko no ifuku'* (the best clothes) and he says that Japanese people used to have *'the best sense of fashion in the world'* – he sees himself as re-establishing a sense of fashion through the kimono. In this particular discourse, the enemy is not so much Western fashion trends, since he integrates the very language of mainstream fashion to his discourse about fashion kimono, but the traditionalist shops that, in his view, killed off the fashionable nature of the kimono. For his customers, he advocates a *'yōfuku tokidoki kimono'* (Western clothes and sometimes kimono) lifestyle that puts little pressure on customers to follow him to the letter in completely rejecting Western clothes. In doing so, he takes his lead from writer and essayist Ima Kikuchi who originally proposed this lifestyle choice in her illustrated essays.

It is also interesting to note here that there are parallels with other types of clothing that have typically been considered to be *'outside'* the realm of fashion discourses, such as religious attire. Traditional clothing (such as the kimono) and religious dress (such as modest Islamic dress) have for different reasons been considered antithetical to consumer culture and the associated discourse of fashion – traditional dress because it supposedly predates industrialisation and the modern fashion industry, and religious dress because it is purportedly rooted in religious precepts that stress piety and modesty, in opposition to the *'vanity'* of self-expression. Anthropologists and academics in the social sciences have in the last decade begun to seriously explore the relationship of Islam and Muslim women's fashion (see Tarlo and Moors 2013, Crăciun 2017, Bucar 2017, Alimen 2018). The last two decades have seen the *'emergence of Islamic consumer culture and engendered a greater heterogeneity of Islamic styles of dress which were attractive and appealing for younger, more affluent Islamic women'* (Tarlo and Moors 2013: 9). In much the same way that the kimono has recently been consciously configured within the framework of

fashion and self-expression through consumption, so it seems, has Islamic fashion³⁵. Emma Tarlo, in her biographies of three Muslim women in London, gives us an indication of why this might be. Tarlo notes that there has been a recent ‘decentralisation of fashion, demonstrating how new aesthetics and styles emerge both through grounded practices and through the multidirectional (if unequal) flow of ideas and commodities across class, ethnic and geographic boundaries’ (Tarlo 2007: 144). As a result, generating discourses about fashion is no longer the sole preserve of authorities such as designers and high fashion brands, but also ‘the preserve of ordinary citizens’ whose explorations of fashion participate ‘in the formation of new “subcultural” and “street” styles, which may or may not become mainstream (*ibid*). Fashion discourses focused on stylishness have infiltrated the world of modesty and veiling in the same way that it has begun to permeate the world of traditional dress in Japan, two types of clothing typically considered far removed from the realms of fashion and individual self-expression. This suggests, as Tarlo argues, a decentralisation of discourses on fashion but it also suggests that agents, such as Shibakawa-san in the case of the kimono, increasingly seek to integrate traditional dress into discourses on fashion and individual self-expression.

Shibakawa-san’s articulation of discourses on individuality and fashion in the context of the kimono also provide a critique of the way that many academic works dealing with traditional Japanese culture have used the framework of cultural nationalism. Cultural nationalism is defined by Kosaku Yoshino as a discourse that

aims to regenerate the national community by creating, preserving or strengthening a people’s culture identity when it is felt to be lacking, inadequate or threatened. The cultural nationalist regards the nation as the product of its unique history and culture and as a collective solidarity endowed with unique attributes. In short, cultural nationalism is concerned with the distinctiveness of the cultural community as the essence of a nation.

Yoshino 1992: 1

According to interpretations of Japanese society based on cultural nationalism, Japanese identity is ‘felt to be lacking, inadequate, or threatened’ due to the speed of Japan’s modernisation

³⁵ It should of course be noted that depending on where in the world we choose to focus an analysis of Islamic fashion, the notion itself varies widely, and there are also trends against fashion in the Islamic world.

process which, taking place as from the second half of the 19th century, stripped Japan of its ‘traditional’ culture and replaced it with Western norms, culture and ideas (see Vlastos 1998, Pyle 1995 and Jansen 2000), and leading to an existential questioning of Japanese identity and what it means to be Japanese. Interestingly, much of academic literature on Japan asks the same question, particularly in the late 20th century. As Roger Goodman writes, “‘Who are the Japanese?’” became the question that dominated the study of Japan in the 1980s’ (Goodman in Roberston 2005: 59). A key element of cultural nationalism analysis examines the way that traditional culture, such as tea ceremony, kabuki and Noh theatre, flowering arranging, poetry, music and material culture such as the kimono, lacquerware and pottery to name but a few elements of traditional Japanese culture, are utilized in a discourse which reinforces an essentialised sense of Japanese identity which is unique and distinct from the rest of the world. This analysis has its roots in the 1980s and 1990s, when ‘debunking’ theories of Japanese uniqueness, popularised in the large genre of literature *Nihonjinron*, was a core element of Japanese Studies and academic enterprise related to Japan. As Goodman and Refsing write, ‘the features which constitute this “unique Japaneseness” include the ideas that the Japanese are a particularly homogeneous people, that they are naturally harmonious, and that the society is based on hierarchical interpersonal relations that involve respect for authority’ (Goodman and Refsing 1999: 11). It should be stressed here that *Nihonjinron* is a real phenomenon, with vast amounts of literature and material aimed at proving that Japan is a cultural Galapagos and that the Japanese are unique. The discourse of uniqueness is present in Japan, and there is undoubtedly a certain level of existential questioning on the subject of what, if anything, defines Japaneseness. However, once more we can question to what extent *Nihonjinron*, as a *process* of exploring nationhood and national identity, is different from similar processes of nation-building in other countries (Goodman in Roberston 2005: 59)

What I wish to discuss here is the way the cultural nationalism analysis has focused on Japanese traditional culture in particular. Following this analysis, customs, arts and material culture that fall into the category of ‘traditional’ Japanese culture are utilised to reinforce discourses of unique and distinct Japanese culture. Yoshino makes this argument, stating that respondents to his survey viewed traditional culture as one of the elements that made Japan unique: ‘most respondents did not express their ideas of Japanese uniqueness in terms of this type of culture [traditional arts and customs such as flower arranging, tea ceremony, etc]. If asked, however, whether traditional arts were an important element of Japanese cultural uniqueness, all answered

affirmative' (Yoshino 1992: 111). In other words, it did not occur to Yoshino's respondents to link Japanese arts and Japanese uniqueness until asked specifically. Further, it could be argued that any culture defines its specificity in terms of its cultural activities, something which Yoshino himself recognises: 'artistic-literary culture (such as literature, visual arts, music, and artistic artefacts and rituals) is an important source of national cultural identity in many countries' (*ibid* 110).

Linking cultural nationalism with Japanese traditional arts is common, such as with Kristin Surak's work on the tea ceremony. Surak sees the tea ceremony as a 'practice of nation-work, at a nexus between high-flying nationalist discourses and mundane expressions of nationness in everyday life' (Surak 2013: 9). The kimono too, as an item of traditional material culture, has also been understood in terms of how the kimono can be used to reflect and intensify Japanese national identity:

[...] kimono today and the right wearing of them are redolent of the ever-present issue in Japan of being authentically Japanese. [...] Even as the kimono has shrunk and changed in response to these pressures (and not always to the enhancement of its inherent aesthetic), it has embodied Japan.

Dalby 2001: 126

As I explored in Chapter 1 and 2, Goldstein-Gidoni has also analysed the kimono in terms of its role in reinforcing a discourse on Japanese femininity. I do not argue that these understandings based on cultural nationalism are wrong, *per se*, rather that they are limitative. If we look at the kimono as an economic object that is made and sold, then we open up the possibilities of understanding the kimono as something which is not only subject to discourses on Japanese identity, but subject to multiple discourses. The example of Azumaya shows how multiple discourses about the kimono can be, and the extent to which they have diversified over the last decade, and demonstrates how discourses that are often thought of as antithetical to ideas of Japaneseess, such as individuality, the expression of deep preferences and self-expression, are as deep-rooted for consumers around the world as they are for Japanese consumers of the fashion kimono who come to Shibakawa-san's shop. If the kimono was *only* a vehicle for Japanese gendered and national identity, such Dalby and Goldstein-Gidoni suggest it is, then it would be very difficult for Shibakawa-san to articulate a discourse about fashion, *oshare* (style), *kosei* (individuality) and self-expression. For Shibakawa-san, the kimono is not primarily about

representing a nation. It is a livelihood but also a marketing strategy and a discourse which he himself fervently believes in.

Opposition to the rest of the kimono industry

Azumaya occupies a marginal place in the world of clothing retail in Japan. *Yōfuku* (Western clothing) and *wafuku* (Japanese clothing, including kimono and obi) are separate industries, and *yōfuku* chains both domestic and foreign represent the overwhelming majority of clothing stores and account for the vast majority of sales of clothing in Japan. While part of the *wafuku* world of retail, Azumaya distinguishes itself from the *wafuku* industry at large. While kimono shops do not sell mass-produced clothes (although in some case it could be argued that some production methods are on their way to a mass production system), it can be argued that for most of the second half of the century, their wares have converged into a single ‘type’ of kimono: silk, formal kimono patterned according to a rigid canons of ‘appropriated’ patterns taken from literature, art and architecture. They too have been subject to their very own form of ‘massification’. As I have discussed in Chapter 2, the kimono in 20th century Japan underwent a process of formalisation that, while producing a plethora of different types of kimono, also homogenised the style of kimono to suit the ‘kimono canon’.

When Shibakawa-san took over from his father in the 1990s, Azumaya used to be a fairly typical kimono shop: the family wore Western clothes, they organised group tours and events in the same way that other shops did, and they too sold expensive, formal kimono. There was little to distinguish Azumaya from any other shop. But Shibakawa-san was faced with a problem. Azumaya had fewer customers and business was not doing so well. For a time, he even dabbled in selling Western clothes too, to shore up income. At the same time, as he relates it to me, Shibakawa-san was deeply unhappy with the way the industry worked. He found it callous and soulless – attempting to coerce women into buying kimono that he himself was not particularly interested in and that they themselves might not particularly want. He was on a search for two things: a way to keep income stable – and a way to be happier in his work. In fact, Shibakawa-san talks a lot about happiness. One of his favourite phrases is ‘*otagai ni happii*’: mutually happy (using the English word happy). He means this with reference to himself and his customers, but also in his business deals with wholesalers and craftspeople. In this way, Shibakawa-san performs

what Arlie Russell Hochschild calls ‘emotional labour’ in regards to his customers. In *The Managed Heart*, Hochschild writes that many people in the modern labour force, particularly in the service industry, but to a certain extent in all other areas as well, are required to ‘manage’ their emotions: ‘this labor requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others’ (Hochschild 2012: 20). She gives the example of female flight attendants: ‘in the case of the flight attendant, the emotional style of offering the service is part of the service itself, in a way that loving or hating wallpaper is not a part of producing wallpaper. Seeming to “love the job” becomes part of the job; and actually trying to love it, and to enjoy the customers, helps the worker in this effort’ (*ibid* 19). When it comes to the service industry in Japan, comparatively speaking Japanese customers have extremely high expectations when it comes to customer service, and high demands are placed on the emotional labour of workers. Having cultivated an image as friendly and approachable, a shop that works on the principle of ‘mutual happiness’, Shibakawa-san has to maintain that image and meet expectations at all costs. Hochschild indicates that emotional labour can take a toll on those from whom it is required. In Shibakawa-san’s case, much of the time his enthusiasm seems genuine, and only occasionally does he allow fatigue or irritation to show. When he does, he chooses quite carefully who he shows this to. He is known for his passion about his work, and this does appear to be both a personally held value and a commercial image to maintain. Those close to him affectionately refer to him having a ‘switch’: once he has been asked a question or asked to expand on what he believes in (as I would often do), Shibakawa-san is quite happy to talk at great length. Shibakawa-san is a man at home with words and in fact he rarely stops talking. He has thought about his past a great deal, and he has built up a narrative about how he changed, and the path of improvement that he feels he has walked. In this narrative, he locates the beginning of change to a single moment: being told by a customer that she didn’t want to buy kimono from a shopkeeper who did not wear them. This seems to have made something click in Shibakawa-san’s mind, a truth which most subculture shopkeepers know instinctively: to appeal to a subculture customer, you have to be passionate about what you sell, and that involves *liking* the things that you sell. It seems that the beginning of his search for self-improvement and his mission to keep his business afloat began at this moment, and they became inextricably intertwined. So much so that nowadays he will say ‘I am not selling kimono. I am selling my soul, my heart itself’.

This reinvention of both self and business revolves around distancing himself from the rest of the industry. It is both a business strategy and a personal mission. In doing so, he stands out from the crowd *and* he appeals to customers because he presents himself (and in fact, is) everything that the rest of the industry is not. As I explored in Chapter 3, Japanese customers are deeply mistrustful of the kimono industry. Shopkeepers have a reputation for coercing customers to buy and even for lying about the origins and quality of their products. Shibakawa-san is at great pains to establish that he is trustworthy and honest. He is fond of saying that his job is to ‘sell reassurance’, as he does in the vignette at the beginning of this chapter. This extract from the vignette is particularly illuminating:

Me? I don’t want to sell expensive things. I want to sell things that people like! Up until now, shops thought of themselves as *erai* (superior). They would look down on young people and say things like ‘you wouldn’t be able to afford it anyway’. I want to be the opposite of that. I want my shop to be friendly, and easy to just pop into to have a look.

Of course, Shibakawa-san is not on this mission alone. He has the backing of his family: his experienced father, who saw the heyday of the formal kimono boom and who now remains largely behind the scenes, shouldering tasks such as cutting kimono fabric in readiness for them to be sewn up. He also has his mother, who like him is an energetic, charismatic figure much loved by the customers. Shibakawa-san and his mother see to the lion’s share of *sekkyaku* – dealings with customers. In 2016, he took on an apprentice, Sen-kun. He can also rely on Kyoko, whose meticulous and precise way of doing things is put to good use with the washing of bolts and categorizing of goods. His parents and wife all agreed to his new rule of wearing the kimono every day. Without such support, Shibakawa-san’s road to reinvention might not have been so smooth.

When it comes to reinventing his shop and winning over his customers, Shibakawa-san does not stop at discourse. While at home with words, he is also at home with action, and he has taken steps to distinguish himself from ‘those’ kimono shops that are stuffy and expensive. He told me once that he decided to do ‘what none of the others were doing’. He had to stand out. This is his ‘discourse-in-action’: his oppositional discourse is not simply abstract or representational, it is embodied in action. For starters, he chose to take advantage of the economic crisis of the 1990s to change his dealings with wholesalers. Shibakawa-san buys all their stock and avoids the lending

system that many shops rely on. He also avoids all the large wholesalers. When I asked him about his relationship with the *tonya*, he told me,

We don't go through *tonya*. We buy everything we have and we buy direct from workshops. That's the best way, the fairest way. Most shops borrow, and they live with that fear of not being able to sell, of having to return their items. Frankly, I am waiting for that whole system to collapse. Sooner or later. Fewer and fewer kimono are being made and people like me buy up all the good ones fast. The rest get borrowed, and they never really sell. The kimono are just being 'digested'. Most will never be sold, no matter how many times they are borrowed. It isn't viable.

Most unusually for kimono shops, he is directly involved in the design and creation of a number of projects. One such example is his collaboration with a producer of Mikawa cotton. Mikawa is the region in which Azumaya itself is situated and has long been one of the nation's oldest cotton-growing regions. Shibakawa-san cuts ties with major *tonya* and endeavours to buy direct from makers and craftspeople. He involves himself directly in the process of designing and crafting goods. One day I accompanied him on a visit to a Mikawa cotton producer. Shibakawa-san had tested the idea of weaving together black threads and coloured threads, leading to a series of kimono cotton that became popular due to the richness and depth of colour, but also the uncanny way the colour seemed to change in the light. Here is the purple version:





Now he was curious to see if he could do the same in white, and he visited the workshop where he had hatched the idea with the craftspeople, who turned out to be a quite elderly couple who, entirely on their own, grew the local Mikawa cotton, processed the cotton and wove it, with input from Shibakawa-san. Since Shibakawa-san had brought both his apprentice Sen-kun (who was filming the meeting so as to report online to Azumaya customers) and myself, first we were shown the cotton drying in the sun after the harvest. We were also shown the cotton fields, with some cotton still left to harvest.





The test with the white warp thread was not conclusive. It was determined that a bright colour was necessary to have a sufficient impact, but overall Shibakawa-san and the craftsman agreed that the effect was not as striking as the black warp project, which was doing well. In the previous photo Shibakawa-san is discussing the matter with the craftsman in the workshop while Sen-kun examines the result of the test on the loom. His camera is just visible behind him.

Shibakawa-san is involved in many such collaborative projects, some are with local craftspeople with no strong visible public presence such as the Mikawa cotton craftspeople, precisely because he wants to bring greater awareness to local craft and dynamise this ailing industry, but some projects are with more prominent figures, such as the *zori* maker Calen Blossio. Calen Blossio kimono shoes, or *zori*, are very popular amongst people who wear fashion kimono because they are easy to walk in and comfortable. However, the *hanao*, the part of the shoe that goes between the toes, cannot be removed or adjusted, unlike with other types of *zori*. Shibakawa-

san proposed that Calen Blossio start making adjustable *zori*, and the result of the collaboration is available for purchase in Azumaya.

Such direct collaboration with craftspeople is almost unheard of in the kimono retail industry, which is, as I have discussed, subject to a fairly rigid separation of tasks. By doing this, Shibakawa-san is not only generating new collaborative projects, but he is taking a stand vis-à-vis the rest of the industry. By involving himself directly in production, he is subverting the chain of distribution and the role of the retailer. He also has a hands-on approach with more than the design of the products. He and his family take on as many roles as they can in the shop. His father cuts the bolts according to the measurements of the client. Shibakawa-san himself learnt how to replace the *hanao* on *zori* shoes. One day in March, a client came asking for her *hanao* to be replaced. Shibakawa-san did so within the hour. Normally, the shoes would have had to be sent off to a specialist and it would be a week or more before the shoes were ready.





This discourse-in-action is a clear message to the customer, immediately understandable, that Azumaya is different from other shops. Their actions, behaviour, marketing strategies and novel ways of doing things that evoke ‘going the extra mile’, inspire one very important feeling in their customer, which is trust. As Giddens notes, trust is a source of ‘psychological security’ (Giddens 1991: 19). Their efforts, in many ways, aim at establishing a relation of trust and associating Azumaya with psychological security– something which fosters long-term customers. Trust is a key problem in the kimono industry. Kimono shops established themselves as experts with elite knowledge about their products. The retailer, in this discourse, had the necessary expertise to educate shoppers, elevating their tastes and guaranteeing better purchases (Trentmann 2006: 14).

Often in the case of kimono shops, however, the retailer could, if they chose to, exploit their customers’ lack of knowledge about the kimono to sell their products at a higher price. Shibakawa-san makes no secret of his hatred for the pushy marketing strategies he himself once used and that are still employed by other shops. By indicating a clear opposition, in word and deed and, indeed, self, Azumaya reassures potential customers. This is not to say that there are no expensive kimono in Azumaya, even though the word ‘formal’ has officially been taken down. They are still there, and they are still expensive. They are, however, rarely on display, and usually only brought out on specific request. They are literally backstage, behind the kimono that fall into a more affordable range. This ‘affordable range’ goes from 20,000 yen (£130) to 70,000 yen (£455), so it is still expensive, something which Shibakawa-san himself recognises. He has thought a great deal about what niche the kimono should occupy for the consumer. If it is not being worn for ceremonial wear, then, he reasoned, it could be branded differently. ‘I want people to think of kimono the same way that they think of iPads,’ he said to me, grinning. ‘Sure, they’re expensive, but they’re fun and it’s not a huge stretch to buy one.’ That being said, for many people they still would be difficult to afford. Shibakawa-san defends the expensive prices of some kimono fabrics, however. Given the effort and time it takes to make certain types of bolts, it is only normal that they cost 300,000 yen (£2001), he maintains. But he is savvy in that he has a much more extensive range of more affordable options as well as the high-flying snowflake tie-dye from Fujii Shibori or a subtly understated Oshima from Ueda-san’s Masugi. These last two might be highly coveted by the core members of the fashion network, who compete to become the best connoisseur, but Shibakawa-san loves to foster interest in kimono in people who have just started to become

interested, and he makes a point of always recommending the more affordable cotton options first and steering clear of formal silk kimono unless the customer insists.

Shibakawa-san has been careful to foster customers who like kimono, but as with any retailer he must also negotiate hurdles such as complaints. I once witnessed a complaint a customer had sent in through the post with regards to the stitching of the kimono. Azumaya prides itself on the quality of the local seamstresses' work³⁶ so this complaint was taken very seriously. After carefully examining the returned goods, they analysed every possible flaw. Azumaya's first action was to apologise and suggest how to put on the kimono that would keep the central stitching line that goes down the length of spine straight. The customer was satisfied with the outcome and did not ask for a refund.

'It's part of the job,' Shibakawa-san told me afterwards. 'You get to the bottom of it, and you find a way for the customer to be satisfied. Even if someone gets angry with you it's ok. It's just like that in the heat of the moment and then they calm down. You find a way.'

Azumaya has much in common with shops that cater to lifestyle subculture: others may not necessarily understand what is so great about kimono, but the community does, and they revel in their shared knowledge. By locating the kimono within a discourse about fashion, pleasure and fun, by paying homage to the craftspeople and through his enthusiasm for the products, Shibakawa-san is showing that he has a 'correct' attitude towards kimono, unlike his competitors. Another way to understand this is through the concept of 'subcultural capital'. Moore argues that in the case of the alternative rock scene in San Diego,

Subcultural capital is accumulated through style and consumption, through taste in music along with clothing, hairstyle, tattoos, body piercing, and so forth. One must have a discriminate ear for the right sound and eye for the right look (or, perhaps most importantly, an ear for the wrong sound and an eye for the wrong look). The crucial factor is that knowledge about music and style cannot appear to have been acquired through the mainstream media or other outlets of the culture industry. Even if this is the case, it must be denied, for subcultural capital rests on "being in the know" in ways that verify one's autonomy from conformity to commercial hype. This is why knowledge

³⁶ None of Azumaya's wares are sent abroad to be sewn. It is estimated that about 70% of kimono are now stitched abroad, mainly in China.

about obscure music is so valuable in the accumulation of subcultural capital, for it is the sort of information that cannot be obtained from the mainstream media.

Moore 2005: 232-4

Moore emphasises the importance of knowledge, more particularly embodied knowledge such as recognising the right or wrong sound. Further, being in the know and sharing the right knowledge is key to constructing a community based on subcultural capital since knowledge produces a defining borderline between those who know and those who do not, and thus allows the community to distinguish itself from its opposition.

Shibakawa-san is very vocal about how the rest of the industry ‘fails’ the kimono and their customers. As far as he is concerned, they are stuck in a system in which both the customer and the producer loses out, and the wholesalers make the most profit. In addition to adding services to his shop that normal shops do not provide (such as cutting the cloth and changing *hanao* on *zori* shoes), he has also eliminated the service that he associates with morally dubious arenas in the kimono industry, such as *furisode*. As a result, Azumaya does not offer rental *furisode*. A close friend of Shibakawa-san, Osamu Kosugi told me: ‘if you do *furisode*, then you end up having to think about hair, makeup, photographs, hiring all these extra people and contracts. You rent everything out. Once you’re into all that, I don’t think you can even call yourself a kimono shop anymore.’ It is for that reason that Azumaya eschews the *furisode* completely. That being said, Shibakawa-san still has to engage with the rest of the industry in some form or other, even though he tries to vet his providers as much as possible.

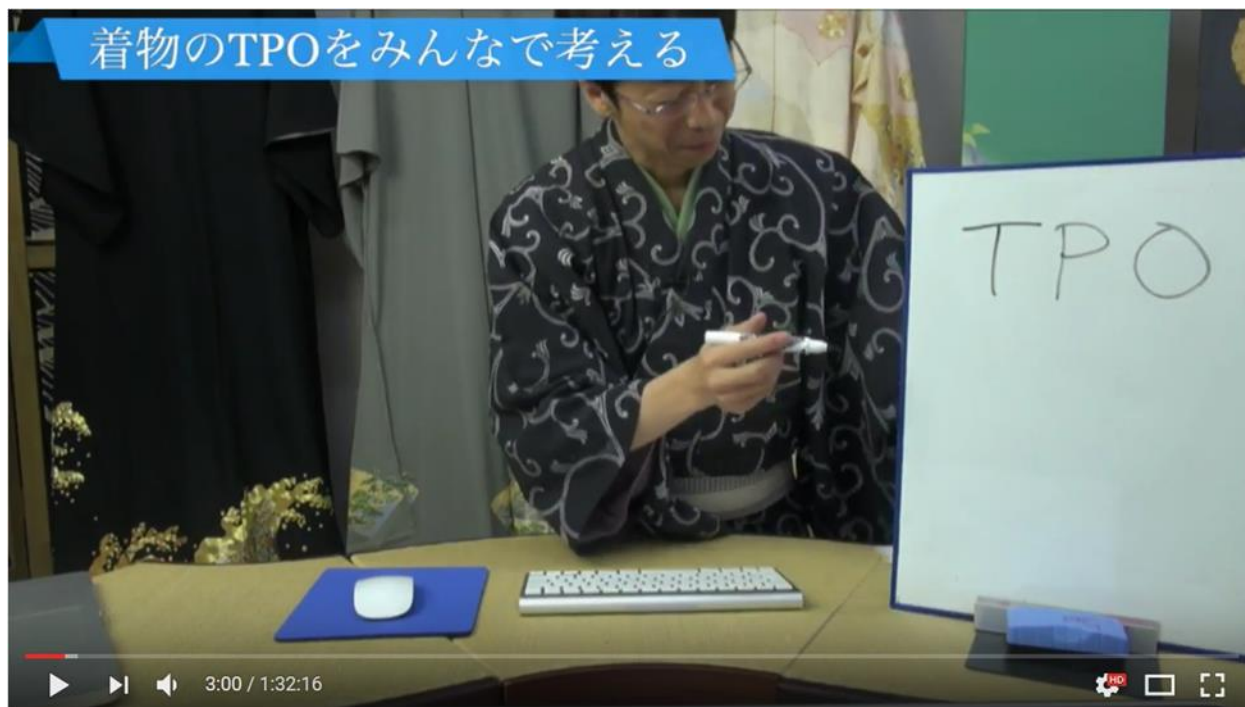
There is another way in which Shibakawa-san endeavours to reach beyond his immediate customer base. Every week on Saturdays at 9pm (before 2017 this took place on Sundays), Shibakawa-san broadcasts a ‘show’ live from his shop on the Internet. To do this, Shibakawa-san had to purchase specialist equipment and rely on help from Sen-kun (referred to in the context of the show as ‘*puchi D*’ (little director) and a customer called Fuhito Katō (referred to as ‘*sabbu-D*’, sub-director). Both of them interject during the broadcast, usually asking Shibakawa-san questions submitted by customers on the live feed. Using Youtube live, Japanese live channel *niko-niko dōga*, YouStream³⁷ and Facebook live, Shibakawa-san does a type of one-man show in which he talks about a range of subjects, anything from features about particular weaving and dyeing techniques,

³⁷ <http://www.ustream.tv/channel/test2213> (retrieved 18/04/2018).

about *kitsuke* (for men, for women, for *hakama* and other special items), explanations about sizing and sewing, topics on the workings of the industry (and its faults), kimono types and when to wear them and offering perspectives on how kimono are changing with regards to style, colour and TPO³⁸. He sees the channel as a way to disseminate knowledge about the kimono and also the industry, more generally speaking, for free, but this knowledge is mediated by his worldview and his self-described ‘passion’ (*atsui omoi*) about the kimono as fashion. This frequently involves placing himself in direct opposition to the rest of the industry and their focus on expensive ceremonial kimono.

In his broadcasts, he often uses phrases such as *bucchakeru* (to be blunt, honest), *gyōkai ni okorareru hōsō* (a ‘broadcast that’s going to make the industry angry with us’) when he takes a stand against the rest of the industry. Sometimes, rather playfully, he says ‘this time I am talking to you in my capacity as a broadcaster rather than as a kimono shop owner’. He puts the industry into question by saying that kimono TPO rules are post WWII inventions, created when the industry took over the role of counselling the public about the ‘correct’ kimono to wear for any given occasion. He does not advocate for getting rid of the TPO completely, but rather for people to understand that these rules are more flexible than they expect and are subject to greater regional and contextual variation than the industry. ‘Imagine someone who wants to wear kimono. But among her acquaintance, there is no one to ask about what to wear. So she buys a book, and finds out about TPO. But then when she tries wearing it, someone says ‘oh you’ve got that wrong!’ and she feels embarrassed, ashamed. She stops wearing it. Why on earth would you bother wearing something that’s so expensive *and* ends up attracting criticism! *That* is the problem!’ The point of the broadcast is not just about listening to Shibakawa-san talking. All the platforms that support the broadcast enable viewers to leave comments. Viewers comment on each other’s comments, and Shibakawa-san, aided by Fuhito Katō and Sen-kun, frequently take up the comments, allowing the viewers a participatory role in the show. Below are two stills from a broadcast in which Shibakawa-san talks about TPO, and another where he is promoting 25-year old independent dye artist known as Momo-san.

³⁸ Kimono etiquette is often referred to in Japan using the English abbreviation for Time, Place, Occasion.





Other broadcasts are Q&A sessions, often entitled ‘Ask us Anything!’ or ‘Go Ahead and Ask!’ Shibakawa-san also brings in guests, such as other retailers, makers, craftspeople, writers, and, on one occasion, me. While most of the guests have something to promote, such as their own wares or their books or other things, my purpose was mainly to talk about my research and the fact that I like kimono and to encourage Japanese people to wear them more. The message being that, after all, if I as a foreigner could do it, couldn’t they as well?



Shibakawa-san also did a special series on his trip to the UK and his talk at St Cross College on 23rd November 2017. A number of shopkeepers and retailers in Shibakawa-san's circle (who will feature prominently in the next chapter) had undertaken trips abroad, and Shibakawa-san was keen to imitate them. Both he and I were eager to see how a non-Japanese audience would react to him and his work. In this way, for him it was simultaneously a novelty, a holiday and a way of raising his profile among his peers and customers in Japan. He also saw it as a favour to me, whom he views as a 'bona fide third party', in his own words. For me it was also an opportunity to do something for him in return for the hospitality and kindness he had shown to me when I was doing my fieldwork. Social contracts and reciprocity are particularly highly valued in Japan, and my hosting Shibakawa-san and setting up the talk was a natural continuation of that particular social bond.

The process of building Azumaya in opposition, then, is intertwined with Shibakawa-san's reinvention of himself and his professional and personal identity, in such a way that at times Shibakawa-san and Azumaya appear to be fused. Many customers and associated retailers or craftspeople will often refer to 'Shibakawa-san' or 'Azumaya-san' interchangeably. Further, Shibakawa-san's oppositional discourse towards the rest of the industry is a 'discourse-in-action' in which he deploys many strategies to distance himself from the 'traditionalists' in the industry. This involves a complicated relationship with Western clothing and fashion, simultaneously oppositional but also using the language of fashion as a means to recreate Azumaya as *the* shop to go to for kimono-as-fashion. In all subcultures, the relationship to the mainstream is ambiguous: opposition is required, but frequently the boundary between the subculture and the mainstream can be ambiguous, requiring constant renegotiation. In the next section, I explore how place-making at the site of the shop Azumaya demonstrates how the concept of lifestyle, rather than the word 'subculture', might encapsulate the phenomenon of the kimono as fashion.

2. A ‘tasty’ shop: place-making and Azumaya as home and community

In this section, I explore the way in which the place-making project of Azumaya reflects how the shop has become the ‘home’ of a fashion kimono lifestyle. In stark contrast to other kimono shops where customers are expected, even pressured, into buying something, Shibakawa-san told me that ‘I want my shop to be a place where people hang out. Whether you’ve come to buy just one *koshihimo* (kimono tie) or nothing at all, I want you to feel welcome.’ For many if not most retailers, creating the right sense of space in a site of consumption is key to ensuring that customers spend. Charles McIntyre has noted that in creating a sense of being immersed in a positive environment was a major part of the experience of going to a music shop (McIntyre 2009: 467). This state of immersion leads the customer to become so involved that they lose a sense of time and can set their worries and frustrations aside. Importantly, the shop also provides the basis for community-building in that it is a space to meet others, reinforce bonds and create pleasurable associations. In the case of Azumaya, this ‘state of immersion’ involves generating a sense of being at home and being relaxed, a space where customers feel that they can spend time regardless of whether they buy or not. Of course, the longer they are there, the more likely it is that something will catch their eye and that they will buy it, either then or during another visit. However, Shibakawa-san is keen to point out that he does not necessarily encourage people to buy. He jokes that he sometimes has to stop people from buying things and positions himself as being on the customer’s side since he is helping them save money. He also displays integrity in the eyes of the customers because he is keen to demonstrate that he will not make profit at all costs, again flying in the face of the image Japanese people have of kimono shops.

This friendly atmosphere confers a home-like quality to Azumaya. Mass consumption, Sack argues, does not have a home (Sack 1988: 199). Japanese shopping centres, Aeon and Jusco and the like, and smaller shops such as Uniqlo, are everywhere the same, standardized according to managerial norms and decisions. Though as Miller has argued, consumption can be identity-building and creative, modern shopping undeniably has an impersonal nature, possibly partly due to the fact that ‘the framework of retailing is normally determined by managers and executives, who reduce consumers and retailers to economic indicators in a battle for profitability and shareholder approval’ (Trentmann 2006: 167). With most chains and in most supermarkets, we

rarely expect to come across the same shop assistant or cashier. These sites are rarely those in which we are able to foster social bonds.

The customers of Azumaya, in a sense, do have a home. Azumaya *is* a home. The Shibakawas are often all present: Shibakawa-san and his mother, the Okami-san, talking with customers, Shibakawa-san's wife, Yukari-san, behind the desk, his father moving busily from task to task and the children, whenever they are back from school. Being at Azumaya for any length of time means being witness to the life of the Shibakawas. Yukari-san getting on her bike to do grocery shopping. Shibakawa-san's parents fetching the children from school. It means becoming involved in the life of the family and drawn in to the routine at Azumaya. This was perhaps particularly the case with me, as I spent many days at Azumaya, but I witnessed many customers coming to spend entire afternoons in the shop.

'Come with me, Julie,' the Okami-san told me one day. Always bright-eyed and full of energy, she led me outside the shop. It was a warm day in late spring, and summer was just around the corner. She had just changed the display in the window, dressing the mannequins in *yukata* to reflect the change in the seasons. She had spent some time tying and retying the obi, then decorating them with lace.

We stood together across the street from the window display.

'What do you think?' she asked me. 'Does it look right?'

'It does,' I replied. 'Eye-catching.'

She beamed at me. 'A display has got to look *oishii* (tasty). Customers need to look at it and think "ohh, I want that!"'

It has of course been noted that the word 'consumption' evokes eating (Graeber 2011). Richard Wilk argues that the act of consuming, particularly when this involves shopping, evokes a desire that is similar to hunger and feelings of satiation after eating (Wilk in Ekström and Brembeck 2004: 17-18). The word *oishii* (tasty) is often used in the context of the fashion kimono. Ima Kikuchi, the fashion kimono author, refers to 'mostly *yōfuku*, sometimes kimono' as an adult Japanese person's most *oishii* style, and members of the network tend to share that vocabulary. Being at Azumaya often involves actual food as well – smells from the kitchen waft into the shop front, and often customers can expect to be fed as well as the children. Gifts brought for the Shibakawa family are shared amongst customers, and there is a constant supply of tea. The place-making of Azumaya involves eating and drinking, as well as consuming the kimono there too,

whether that means buying them or simply being around them. Satiation of multiple consumer desires are to be expected in Azumaya, and this is an integral part of the state of immersion that Azumaya seeks to create.

The place-making at Azumaya aims to foster a sense of community, and what is particularly attractive to many customers at Azumaya is this sense of being grounded in a bounded local community in which they, as outsiders, are also welcome. Shibakawa-san himself is a man deeply rooted in his local community, with a strong regional Mikawa identity which is easily perceptible in his dialect and choice of food. He is a member of the lion dancing troupe which performs every year at the annual local festival called Nishio Gion Matsuri (not to be confused with the much bigger and rather more famous Gion Matsuri in Kyoto, which takes place on the same day). In 2016 he was greatly put out to have been coaxed into taking a role in the steering committee. 'It means I can't dance,' he told me grumpily, 'I'd rather be dancing.' Azumaya is rooted in a local community, in which it is an essential feature. Shibakawa-san was very clear to me about the role he envisioned for Azumaya: 'a kimono shop ought to be at the heart of the community. That's what we used to be in the old days: where people would go for help. Not just for things to do with kimono, mind you. For anything.' The life of the Shibakawas is, naturally, at odds with that of much of Japan's population, who do not live in rooted communities and whose sense of community is far more fluid and diffuse. The dissolution of the geographically bounded local community in modern society, partially attributable to social and technological change (Sack 1988: 188) has meant that bounded, tight-knit communities have become places to aspire to and long for. Sack writes that 'we define our purposes and ourselves in terms of our relationships to others in communities. Behind the idea of community lies the question of geographical propinquity. A popular claim is that the real or authentic community is presumed to occur when the spatial manifestations of a particular system of production, consumption, and other social relations overlap and are enclosed within a single place' (Sack 1988: 188). This is exactly what Azumaya is: production, consumption and sociality enclosed within a single space.

What is key in the place-making exercise of Azumaya is to appeal to the customer's positive associations with community while avoiding the sense of an impermeable boundary between the community and outside – the type of hard and fast boundary associated with traditional communities. First-time customers arrive from other parts of Japan, often driving many hours as a result of having seen Shibakawa-san's Internet broadcast or having found his website. When

customers started to arrive from the Tohoku region, the Northernmost part of Japan's main island of Honshu, Shibakawa-san rewrote detailed access instructions on his website. Nishio is after all quite out of the way, even for people living within Aichi prefecture.

I argue that this attraction exercised by Azumaya on the Japanese customer is a symptom of a much wider phenomenon of modern consumption trends. Across industrialised, capitalist nations, the 21st century is characterised by an increasingly ambiguous relationship with mass consumption (Binkley and Littler 2008, Humphery 2010). Although mass consumption has always had its critics throughout the 20th century³⁹, the 21st century has seen a diversification of consumption practices and a dramatic increase in consumption that champions a cause. Increasingly, consumption is as much about politics and people's moral convictions as it is about the construction of personal and social identity. James Carrier sees a rise in 'ethical consumers' – people whose consumption choices are shaped and guided by moral, ethical concerns (Carrier and Luetchford 2012: 1-2). Scandals surrounding the conditions of overseas factories, particularly in the garment and apparel industry, has led to wide-scale criticism of the garment industries. Concerns are also regularly raised over the effect of consumer society on health, the environment and climate change (see Miller 2012). Fair trade coffee, chocolate and other food products have become increasingly common across the industrialised nations (Raynolds 2006). Fair trade is in fact so popular that it is lucrative for companies to go fair trade, as Dairy Milk and Tate & Lyle did in the UK (Carrier and Luetchford 2012: 1-2). Alex Nicholls notes that the global market for fair trade goods represented £2 billion, a 47% increase between 2006 and 2010 (Nicholls 2010: 241). Alternatives to mass consumption and 'ethical', 'organic' and 'handmade' goods are often viewed in a positive light – an example of this is the way handmade objects and craft objects are sold on the social media website Etsy. As Susan Luckman writes, 'the handmade offers a reprise, an alternative and an access to a world where technology takes the form of simple tools, and objects are understood as 'safe' and nostalgic' (Luckman 2013: 254). Being handmade and shaped by an identifiable person gives the customer a 'sense of the "authentic" in an inauthentic world' (*ibid* 254). Non-consumption is also increasingly popular. The minimalist movement which focuses on producing little to no waste and purchasing as little as possible is particularly popular, with widely

³⁹ Such as in the 1960s with the dawning of the environmental movement (see Rome 2003). This is also the case in Japan where significant numbers of consumers voice concerns over the effect of consumption on the environment (Garon and Maclachlan 2006: 13).

read books such as Fumio Sasaki's *Goodbye, Things: On Minimalist Living*. Japan is at the heart of this movement and some books such as Marie Kondo's book *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying: A Simple, Effective Way to Banish Clutter Forever* have been translated into many languages and have become worldwide phenomena promising to bring happiness to the reader by freeing them from the clutches of clutter, which is seen as a symptom of mass consumption. However, it may be that the readership for these books aspires to leading that kind of lifestyle without fully enacting it, in the same way that people read recipe books without attempting to make the recipes themselves. It is perhaps not surprising then that kimono have an appeal because they offer an alternative to mass produced Western clothes. Jenny Hall argues that the kimono can be thought of as a kind of 'slow fashion' in that kimono take more time and some (though not all) of the techniques employed in making a kimono cannot be fully mechanised (Hall 2017). Milhaupt also notes that 'a growing interest in the kimono may have ties to a longing for a slower, more 'traditional' way of life that was no longer sustainable in the high-growth, bubble economy of the 1980s' (Milhaupt 2014: 244).

Japan has long displayed ambivalence towards consumption, simultaneously spending and consuming in great quantities, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, whilst maintaining a seemingly contradictory discourse of thrift, careful spending and moderation (Garon and Maclachlan 2006, Francks 2009: 208). Another expression of Japan's resistance towards mass consumption is the chain shop Muji, which means 'no brand'. Muji markets itself on simplicity and practicality, selling plain, unlabelled goods and comestibles. This is the description of Muji to be found on their European website:

MUJI was founded in Japan in 1980 as an antithesis to the habits of consumer society at that time. On one hand, foreign-made luxury brands were gaining popularity within an economic environment of ever-rising prosperity. On the other, poor-quality, low-priced goods were appearing on the market, and had a polarizing effect on consumption patterns. MUJI was conceived as a critique of this prevailing condition, with the purpose of restoring a vision of products that are actually useful for the customer and maintain an ideal of the proper balance between living and the objects that make it possible. The concept was born of the intersection of two distinct stances: no brand (Mujirushi) and the value of good items (*ryohin*).⁴⁰

⁴⁰ <http://www.muji.eu/pages/about.asp?PT=29> (retrieved 26/01/2018).

The irony, of course, is that although MUJI claims to be the ‘antithesis’ of consumer society, sensible down-to-earth products with no brand, MUJI has brand recognition across the globe. It seems, then, that consumers across the industrialised nations are looking for a ‘better’ alternative to mass consumption, and their choices are driven by moral choices. Consumption in the 21st century is also characterised by another dimension which is ‘experience’. As Lindholm puts it, ‘there is an escalation of the true, the lived experience’ (Lindholm 2008: 53) and this is highly valued among customers. Joseph Pine and James Gilmore posited in their 1998 article ‘Welcome to the Experience Economy’ that economies shift in terms of their main focus. Their central argument is that the late 20th century was the stage for a shift from service-based economy to experience-based economy. Companies likely to succeed in the experience economy, they argued, were those that best knew how to engage with their customer’s feelings and engage ‘customers in a personal, memorable way’ (Pine and Gilmore 1998: 97). Customer trends in the 21st century point towards valuing meaningful experience and alternatives to mass consumption. There is also a critique to be made that consumption choices such as fair trade, organic or handmade are guided by class belonging. It is often the case that such products are more expensive than their mass produced and/or non-fair trade and non-organic counterparts, and this determines access to these products. This is of course not to say that mass consumption is no longer a fact of life. It very much is, and some segments of the population may not share in this ambivalence towards mass consumption, but there is evidence in both academic and business literature that supports a general trend towards positive associations with modes of consumption that are in opposition, or evoke an opposition, to mass consumption.

As much as Azumaya is part of Shibakawa-san’s project to reinvent both himself and his business, as well as a means of staying in business, Azumaya is also a symptom of what many modern consumers across the world, from Japan to Singapore to Germany to Canada, look for. They hunger for the really real, for a point of origin, as Lindholm put it (Lindholm 2008: 53). The idea of ‘authenticity’, be it in products and in the relationship to retailers themselves, is very highly valued, even longed for, by 21st century consumers. Lindholm argues that modern consumers are characterised by a ‘thirst for the genuine’ and tend to locate authenticity in products in terms of their geographic origins (Lindholm 2008: 2). Further, places and products considered to be authentic have the power to bring ‘people together in collectives that are felt to be real, essential, and vital, providing participants with meaning, unity, and a surpassing sense of belonging’ (*ibid*).

Customers have located in Azumaya many of the things that customers seek out in the 21st century – an alternative to mass consumption and a site of ‘authenticity’, both in the products themselves and in relation to Shibakawa-san and the other members of his family. Azumaya offers a mode of interaction, an experience that is quite antithetical to shopping in mass consumption sites. The interaction between the Shibakawas and their customers differs from the impersonal customer service that is the norm of consumption in supermarkets, clothes shops and chain restaurants. The interaction between customer and retailer in most consumption sites is a ritualised affair in which both parties follow a script. Customer service, which may mean smiling, being pleasant, asking about the customer’s day, mimics a genuine interaction, but both parties know that it is not, because the interaction is usually fleeting, never to be repeated by the same two individuals (Sturdy, Grugulis and Willmott 2001: 7-8). This ritual is embedded in what Hochschild would call ‘emotional labour’ as described earlier in this chapter.



Azumaya appeals to the modern customer since the shop appears to offer a much longer-lasting, and arguably genuine, social interaction. A middle-aged couple, I noticed, seemed to spend

much of their time off at Azumaya. Not doing anything in particular, just being. Sometimes chatting, sometimes sewing. And every once in a while an impromptu advice session would happen, in which the Okami-san would show the wife how to tie her obi in a different style, as in the photo below. Her husband and a local restaurant keeper (in yellow) who is a loyal customer and frequent visitor, watch on.

The line between family life and the outside world is permeable. This is visible in terms of the overlap between shop space and home space. I have found myself allowed into the storage spaces of the shop, upstairs where the computers, Buddhist altars and the non-seasonal products are kept, and occasionally similar exceptions are made for other customers.

There is an argument in the literature on modernity in Japan that a particular kind of nostalgia for the past exists in Japanese society, encapsulated by the word *furusato* in Japanese. While the word literally means ‘old village’, it means hometown, and it carries a strong nuance of longing for a home, or a point of origin, lost in the past (see Robertson 1988, Ivy 1995 and Kelly 1986). I would argue that this phenomenon is a widespread trend in developed, modern societies living in post-traditional communities, but that this longing does find a particular Japanese meaning through the word *furusato*. It is partly this longing, perhaps, that goes some way to explaining why Azumaya’s rootedness in the community of Nishio is so appealing, and why customers drive from far and wide to visit. However, I argue that this longing for community, and the answer that customers find in Azumaya, reveals a phenomenon that is not limited to Japan alone. This nostalgia, throughout the industrialised world, is often articulated around the loss of the local community, the ‘traditional sense of place as the basis of the moral order’. There is a profound wish to return to physical, local communities in which ‘we can become rooted’ (Sack 1988: 6-7). Azumaya is symptomatic of a much wider phenomenon of consumer ambivalence towards mass consumption and its sites. I argue that consumers in the 21st century have a distaste for the ‘alienable’ goods of mass consumption and an attraction towards the ‘inalienable’ goods that are crafted or handmade. Fair trade, too, mitigates ‘alienability’ by offering the consumer a connection with the producer who is being treated ‘fairly’ for their work. Japanese customers, like all customers in the developed nations, are sensitive to these trends and the positive and negative dimensions of their consumption. In addition to providing an attractive subculture discourse to customers interested in the fashion kimono lifestyle, Shibakawa-san has, I believe largely unconsciously, aligned Azumaya with the values that 21st centuries consumers long for:

personalised service with a genuine social bond, a sense of rootedness and community and, of course, authentic products with an identifiable point of origin that are made either by hand or by mechanised loom. In other words, Azumaya offers the consumer another world, both far removed from the world of mass consumption and located in a community that belongs to a different time, but with the reassuring structures of modernity such as Internet broadcasts, online shopping and, of course, the familiar discourse of fashion, style and self-expression.

Azumaya, while providing a 'home' and a base for the community of people involved in the fashion kimono lifestyle, is also at the heart of a discourse about the best way to wear and enjoy kimono, and this stands in opposition to both Western clothes and the rest of the kimono industry. Subculture discourse, as we have seen, needs an opposing force in order to define itself in opposition to a mainstream, but the relationship with the mainstream is always ambiguous. This is particularly the case with Shibakawa-san's relationship to Western clothing and fashion, whose discourse he regularly blends with his own. Azumaya, then, can be understood as part of a subculture but also as part of a lifestyle, one which it self-generates. Azumaya is also an example of the nostalgia for community that characterises not just Japan but, I would argue, modern industrialised nations as a whole.

In the next chapter, I explore how Shibakawa-san is not a lone crusader in his mission to get Japanese people to wear the kimono as fashion: he is a member of what I call the 'kimono fashion network', a group of retailers, craftspeople, designers, writers and government officials who are proponents of wearing the kimono as fashion. In the next chapter I explore how this network operates as a community of practice, knowledge and taste.

Chapter 5: Building the kimono fashion network: friends, allies, customers and community



For three days in mid-May 2016, more than eighty people converged on Yonezawa in the northern prefecture of Yamagata. They come from all walks of life and all parts of Japan, but they all have one thing in common: they are ‘fans’ of Ima Kikuchi (or Ima-san as she is usually known), writer, illustrator, kimono fashion designer and vocal supporter of those parts of the kimono industry that she endorses, and equally vocal critic of the parts of the kimono industry that she does not. In fact, the three day event is called the ‘Kikuchi Ima Fan Meeting’, and it brought together key figures from the kimono fashion movement, including several kimono shops. Azumaya, of course, is a key member. There is also a kimono sewing school called Fuji Kōbō⁴¹, independent seamstresses and kimono fashion designers. They have brought their most loyal customers with them, those

⁴¹ <http://fujikobo.com/index.html> (retrieved 14/02/2018).

who have a burning wish to partake in the event and meet Ima-san, even though in most cases they have met her, or at least seen her give a talk before. As the days pass, I realise that there is more to this gathering than simply giving customers a chance to meet the icon of the kimono fashion movement (again). The trip also features four visits to local weavers and dyers. Yonezawa is a renowned *sanchi* (producing region) for kimono, particularly *tsumugi* (pongee). There are also parties, dinners, *onsen* (hot spring) and even a pilgrimage-esque trip to Ima-san's hometown of Murayama, about an hour and a half's drive from Yonezawa.

The first day starts early. I spent the night at the Onodas, and we rise at 5am to get dressed in our kimono. Whilst Kyoko and I scrambled to get ready within 50 minutes, Takashi was ready in 5, and calmly made coffee while we panicked, although I did the lion's share of the panicking. Kyoko and I agonised at length over which kimono to wear – Kyoko because she had too much to choose from and I because I had too little. I settled for a patterned floral kimono that I had had made halfway during my fieldwork from store-bought fabric as opposed to 'proper' kimono fabric. Kyoko, on the other hand, opted for three different outfits, one for each day. I would understand the effort that went into her choices later: there were people to impress. We arrive at 7am at Nagoya central station, where we meet Azumaya's Yoshihide Shibakawa.

He is leading his group of twenty-three customers to Yonezawa. We take the highspeed train to Tokyo, where we pick up another group also converging on Yonezawa, this one headed by Akiko Yoshizawa, a *kitsuke* professional who works independently from any *kitsuke* associations. It is clear that everyone knows each other, or at least knows *of* each other. I am quite possibly the only totally new person there, though my affiliation to Azumaya and my bond with Kyoko are more than enough to justify my presence.

As we congregate in the labyrinthine underbelly of Tokyo station, we attract attention: everyone is wearing a kimono (many of which tend to flout the convention of the 'kimono canon'), many of us are men and almost everyone is aged between 30 and 40. All of these things make us stand out, not to mention my own particularly outlandish presence, kimono-clad foreigners being something of an exception outside of Kyoto. Large groups of kimono-clad people are not entirely unusual, but typically they would consist of women older than 60, usually en route for an activity like tea ceremony. Men in kimono definitely attract attention. The atmosphere is one of excitement, like you would expect from a group going on holiday. This involves, on the supply side, key retailers such as Shibakawa-san, and on the consumer side, the most fully committed and most

avid for knowledge about the kimono, the most eager to get it right from the source, but also their customers who have the financial means to attend.

All expenses included, the trip costs about £900. This effectively restricted the number of people who could feasibly attend. There were also additional costs as well. Many of those who came on the trip changed their outfits every day, and thus required an adequate kimono collection. Kyoko did this, for example. Some, such as myself, were not adequately equipped to do this, and I wore my floral patterned kimono every day. The members of the network were aware that others were going to be there, with their own sharp sense of style and fashion, and they would have to hold their own in terms of good taste and fashion statements. The approved style of conspicuous relaxed and *oshare* kimono wear was in evidence everywhere, particularly the *hanhaba* obi, much beloved of the kimono fashion network members. They all belonged to the same extended network, but they were subdivided into smaller groups depending on which shop or person they were affiliated with. While they shared the same philosophy and similar aesthetic codes that markedly differ from the established kimono canon, individually their styles could differ greatly. Most, I observed, tended to enjoy this slightly competitive edge.

It is possibly the costs that meant that the tour had a slightly secret feel to it, and many of the people there enjoyed the feeling of exclusivity in that they were attending an event that brought together the heart of the network. That being said, more peripheral members were also present, because they could afford to be. Shibakawa-san and the other shop owners had done only the most minimal advertising in the shops. I believe this is partly due to the costs involved in a 3-day trip to Yamagata, and their awareness that some of their customers might have liked to go but could not necessarily afford to do so. There is also a parallel to be drawn with the practices of the ‘traditional’ kimono shops of the 1970s and 80s, in which shop owners would organise trips and excursions for their customers, a custom that has all but died out but about which all the members of the fashion network would have been aware. As a result, this similarity between them and the ‘old world’ of kimono retail might, on some level, have been a little uncomfortable.

The enthusiasm these visitors have for kimono cloth techniques, kimono style and taste, not to mention Ima-san herself, is undeniable. It has more in common with passion than enthusiasm, but the members would most typically refuse the label of ‘fan’. Fans, in the eyes of the fashion network, are people who have yet to fully commit. Most people who are drawn to the kimono fashion lifestyle tend to be strong characters, with intense likes and dislikes. In some cases,

personalities clash, and not everyone in the group gets on. However, their commitment to the philosophy and group identity overrules interpersonal conflicts.

One of the exceptions in this group of colourful characters is a quiet, shy woman staying in the same hotel as Kyoko and I. She is accompanied by her mother, who is the only one present not wearing a kimono. Although there with her daughter, she was the only one present who was wearing Western clothes, and she was clearly not committed to the philosophy of the kimono fashion network.

We travel on to Yonezawa, a further 2-hour trip on the high-speed train. We arrive shortly before midday, and there we pick up more members. Others, I am told, have either already arrived or will be arriving later. We have a busy schedule ahead. The Fan Meeting is not just about Imas-san herself. In fact, we will only be meeting her later in the evening. We have lunch at a soba noodle restaurant, where I get a chance to observe the different groups interacting. The afternoon features a visit to two different workshops. The first, Nitta Textile Industries, is a family-run dye workshop that uses a plant called *benibana* (safflower) to produce a variety of yellow, pink and red dyes. We are shown around the workshop's impressive grounds by Gentarō Nitta, in his early 30s and fifth generation craftsman of the Nitta family. He first tells us about the history of his family business, and then we get to the meat of the event. The group crowds around eagerly as he gives us a demonstration of *benibana* dye, dyeing a handkerchief. This is when I begin to understand just how motivated the group is to learn about the techniques that go into making kimono. They take pictures and ask questions, some of them very technical. They avidly drink up his responses. Their enthusiasm is palpable, and some are taking notes. One member cannot resist telling Nitta-san that she is wearing a *benibana* kimono in honour of the occasion.



We are taken next to the weaving workshop attached to the dye workshop, where local wholesaler Shuya Awano gives us the tour. He is a major player in the fashion kimono community given his close collaboration with Ima-san. He is a jovial, jokey sort, much like Shibakawa-san – a personality type that seems particularly appreciated in the community for their ability to be the life of the party in pretty much any circumstance.

Our next port of call is Hōraiya, a weaving workshop owned by the Kondo family. Like Gentaro Nitta, our guide Tetsuo Kondo is also the fifth generation owner of his business. Like Shuya Awano, he is also a jokey jovial type, and the group laughs uproariously at his jokes as he talks to us before taking us on a tour of the weaving facilities. We split into smaller groups as we are led through the labyrinthine facility and its cramped weaving spaces, where the mechanical looms occupy the space, drowning out the sound of our voices with their steady rhythmic beat. It's oddly soothing, despite the sheer volume, and it brings the human heartbeat to mind. The operators, mostly women aged thirty to fifty obligingly stop the looms for us to examine their work. The

group crowds around, taking pictures and asking to touch the pieces while our guide explains the particularities of each item strung up on the loom, in the process of becoming.

We explore other parts of the workshop, such as the winding floor, where silk threads are wound onto the rollers placed beneath the looms. The bright silk threads themselves wait wound on their own small rollers, ready to be used. We are then unleashed on the small gift shop, where the group pores over the goods and some acquire various spoils whilst others simply enjoy handling the bolts of silks, obi and other accessories.







It's only that evening that the real festivities begin. We head to a fine old Japanese building in which a party for Ima-san's fans will be held. There's buffet food and drinks aplenty, and our groups joyously welcome members who have just arrived, such as the Sakamoto sisters, who own the Sakamoto kimono shop in Tokyo and Darumaya in Hyōgo prefecture. Finally, Ima-san herself appears, and I get my first inkling of just what she means to the group. She is greeted like a celebrity, and members vie to talk to her after her speech. Later on, after everyone is thoroughly steeped in alcohol, we are divided into groups and there is an Ima-san themed quiz. Many of the questions come from Ima-san's books, and those who have most carefully combed through her work get the most answers. Competition is intense. The group to have the most correct answers receives a prize. Later still, there is a raffle with a variety of prizes. Kyoko gets a *hanhaba* (half-width) obi whilst I get three heads of local fermented garlic.

The next day is every bit as action-packed. Today Ima-san spends most of the day with the group, giving us a tour of Yonezawa's sights, including the Uesugi Shrine. Shibakawa-san absconds from the tour with two other male group leaders, and they disappear for a few hours. It turns out that they went drinking – they bring back cherries (the local specialty) to appease us for having left. Although Kyoko rebukes Shibakawa-san, he has cultivated an image of silliness and roguishness among the group, and this gives him leeway. His temporary abandonment of the group is quite soon forgotten and forgiven.

With Shibakawa-san and the others back in tow, we are then taken to Shuya Awano's business, a local *tonya*/maker who works closely with Ima-san. There Ima-san sits before us and gives us a talk about what motivates her to write her books and her philosophy on kimono-wearing.



Ima-san has presence. She is funny, engaging and forceful. She is a natural-born public speaker, and it's quite impossible to be bored during her speeches. The audience watches enraptured as she removes her custom-made 'easy' obi, which simply involves her keeping it together with Velcro as opposed to tying it. 'There are of course *nibushiki* (two-part obi) but this obi hasn't been cut in half at all. It's just a simpler way of putting it on. I thought it would be good to show you all that this is a possibility, so that's why I chose this today.' The audience laughs uproariously as she adds 'of course, with this kind of obi I find it really easy to tell if I've put on weight, so it keeps me on the straight and narrow'. She beams at us. 'Seeing you all here today wearing kimono, it makes us all so happy. You know, the people here in Yonezawa weaving the kimono have hardly ever seen people wearing their kimono. Sometimes they wonder if anyone ever does. Just catching a glimpse of you all is such a boost for them, that's why I want you to wander around Yonezawa until you drop! And remember ladies, if you wear a kimono, you'll be "mistaken" for a beautiful woman. And gentlemen, people will see you as very handsome.' She plays the crowd like a fiddle, riffing off the cultural differences between her native Northern Tohoku and the less reserved, more spontaneous culture of Osaka. 'The nicest thing about wearing a kimono is being praised. We all love that, don't we? And when people praise you, be like a Southerner: just accept it, say thank you.'



The kimono she has designed in collaboration with Shuya Awano are draped elegantly behind her. She has created her own brand of kimono called Skala⁴² based on local Yonezawa techniques. These are particularly mouthwatering for the group, and many members spend considerable time agonising over a purchase.

We then head to the Nonohana indigo dye workshop. Our guide is the son of the current owner, and once he takes over from his father he will be the sixth generation owner of the workshop. The group eagerly don their slippers and follow the soft-spoken indigo dye craftsman to the deep-set vats of indigo dye. I, too, find myself completely hooked, listening to him tell us how he tended to the indigo dye pots as one would tend to a fussy toddler who needs constant monitoring. ‘Indigo is alive,’ he tells us, ‘you have to listen to it, to feel it. Like us, some days it feels good and some days it doesn’t. You have to look out for that.’ He relates his anguish on March 3rd 2011, the day the Great Tohoku Earthquake struck Northern Japan, when, for a terrible moment, he did not know if the great metal pots that had been in the family for decades might have



⁴² <http://kiorien.jp/skala.html> (retrieved 17/07/2017).

been damaged. The group breathed a collective sigh of relief when he told us that the cherished pots had survived the earthquake unscathed. He also shared his initial reluctance at taking on his family's trade, speaking of the embarrassment he felt that his fingertips were always stained blue, but that now he saw it as a badge of pride.

The last event is a dinner at Onogawa Onsen, a Japanese inn with hot springs. Some, including Kyoko and myself, have caved and are no longer wearing kimono – a small and tolerated faux-pas. There is a lavish meal and I watch the alcohol flow, reinforcing and testing bonds at the same time. Signs of wear and tear begin to show among the organisers. Some, like Awano-san, seem to have endless energy for revelry, but even Shibakawa-san, who is normally quite the party animal, is beginning to tire. I find Shibakawa-san resting for a moment in the corridor outside his room, and he gets up immediately to conceal his fatigue. I find myself worrying about him and the heavy-duty partying that he and the others are engaging in. Kyoko and I do not join the festivities, and repair instead to the hot springs. Later Ima-san joins us in the room the three of us have been assigned. Kyoko and Ima-san get on well, and we find ourselves talking into the early hours of the morning.

The next day sees the group reduce in number as some head back home. The rest of the group, including Shibakawa-san's group, are headed out to Ima-san's hometown of Murayama, about an hour and a half outside of Yonezawa. This is perhaps the most important part of the trip – a pilgrimage out to Ima-san's *furusato*, or hometown. We pile onto the bus and snooze our way through the dozy Yamagata countryside. The climate is cooler and dryer here than in central and Southern Japan, and the countryside takes on a distinctly European look, with paddy fields giving way to meadows and pastureland. We arrive at Murayama around noon, and we first go to a restaurant that specialises in what is known in Japan as a '*Genghis*': a dish of vegetables and sheep's meat cooked on a hot metal plate. Though very filling, we head afterwards to the soba (buckwheat noodle) restaurant owned by Ima-san's mother, and are plied with copious amounts of noodles. It is perhaps somewhat excessive, but Ima-san is proud of her rural Yamagata roots, its food and landscape, and consuming this too is part of the package for the most involved members of the kimono fashion network. Ima-san's mother welcomes us and gives us a history of her restaurant in her thick Yamagata dialect.

Ima-san approaches me halfway through to tell me that one of her protégées would like to speak with me. It turns out to be the shy woman who attended the event with her mother. She softly

asks if I have trouble finding kimono in my size. She is as tall as me, and at 5ft9 she is a fairly unusual height for a woman in Japan. We bond over the difficulties getting kimono fitted for tall women and her shyness soon disappears. She tells me that she has kimono that she no longer wears and that she has been trying to part with. She had even gone to ‘giveaway parties’ in which people give away or exchange their kimono. In spite of many of her kimono being modern *fudangi* types, as opposed to the second-hand kimono in many shops that are 30 or 40 years old, and despite their being in mint condition, they were simply too big to fit other women given that they are tailored for a woman who is 5ft9. I eagerly agree to take them off her hands. She takes down my address, visibly relieved. Her mother, too, expresses relief, and it is clear that her mother does not see the same attraction in kimono that her daughter does.

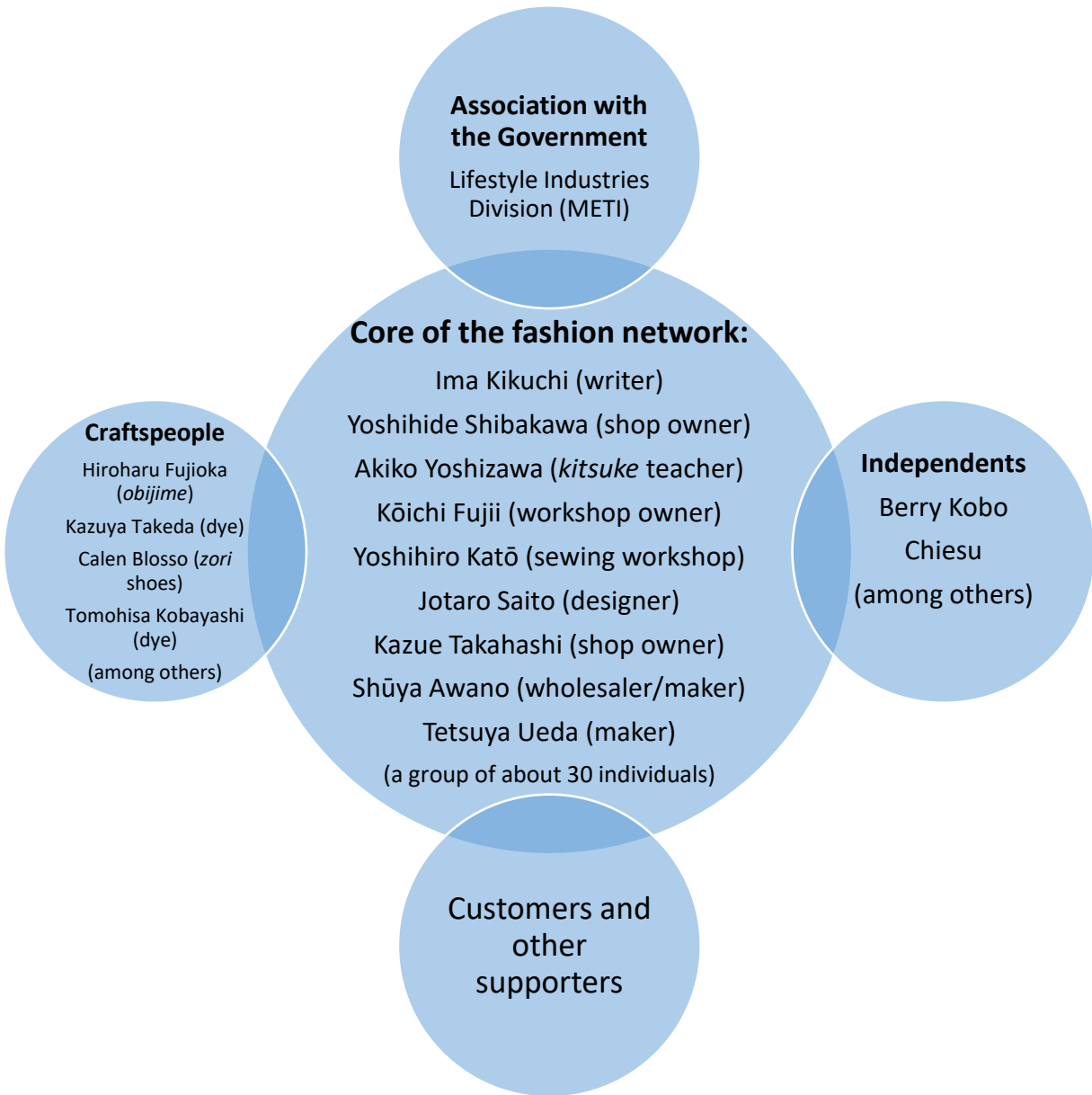
The group makes its way back to Yonezawa, where we pile onto the train to Tokyo. There the remaining members splinter into their separate groups. We head on back to Nagoya, and an earthquake alarm stops the bullet train in its tracks, jolting me from my drowsiness. A medium-strength earthquake had hit quite near Yamagata. Even though it was nowhere near the strength of the March 11th 2011 disaster, it was still strong enough to trigger emergence shutdowns on bullet trains as far south as Tokyo, over hundred miles away. It was a reminder that the echoes of the disaster will still be heard in Northern Japan for many years to come.

On my return to Aichi prefecture, I had expected perhaps two or three kimono from Ima-san’s protégée. I was very surprised, then, when I received a package containing fourteen kimono, three *nagajuban* (underkimono), three obi, bags and *zori* shoes arrived at my host mother’s house two weeks after the Yamagata trip. In many cases, the kimono I am given by research participants are generally quite old, sometimes not in good condition. This was not the case with these: each kimono had been carefully thought through, the lining clearly chosen especially for each kimono. As Kyoko hinted when I reported, shocked and delighted, about the gift, Ima-san’s protégée must have ‘caught the bug’ sometime in her twenties, causing her to purchase many kimono. Many members of the network, even myself, go through a period of needing to purchase kimono and related accessories, and for many it can take a little while to come to their senses. This, too, is a hallmark of the fascination exercised by the kimono over members of the network.

1. Introducing the *nakama*: building the fashion kimono network

The Fan Meeting would not exist without people who wanted it and a network to support it. The previous chapter focused on Azumaya in isolation, but in fact Azumaya operates as part of a network comprised of different members of the kimono industry: shop owners, makers, *tonya*, craftspeople, big name designers such as Jotaro Saito and less well-known independent designers, bloggers, and, of course, customers. Collectively, Shibakawa-san refers to these people as his *nakama*: friends or allies. The Fan Meeting itself is an expression of the core values of the kimono fashion network, and Ima-san occupies a powerful position at the heart of the network: she is both part of the industry since she collaborates with various *tonya*, makers, craftspeople and shop owners, but she is also partially outside the industry, and because she writes about it and her work is popular, she is able to be the arbiter of the industry: she decides which shops are good, and which are bad. Personality is a very important characteristic in the fashion network: a strong sense of individuality, sense of humour and sociability (in addition to knowledge and passion for the ‘kimono lifestyle’) Ima-san is, quite simply put, a force of nature, known for her no-nonsense, direct approach and her sense of humour. The fact that she has completely given up Western clothes in favour of kimono (except when she goes to have a mammogram, she often jokes) means she is a voice authority in the ‘kimono lifestyle’. Speeches given by Ima-san are always a packed, crowd-pleasing event. Earning Ima-san’s support is something of a badge of honour for kimono shop owners, particularly in the kimono fashion movement. In this section, I explore how the kimono fashion network formed, who the main actors are, and how this network is changing the face of the kimono industry from within. In the following section, using Etienne Wenger’s concept of communities of practice, I explore how the fashion network, together with its customers, form a community of practice based on the ‘kimono lifestyle’ – that is, wearing the kimono as fashion. I will expand the idea of a community of practice to include taste, consumption and knowledge.

Below is a simple diagram of the key members of the network. Although the network as a whole comprises too many members to fit into a single diagram, this chart illustrates the key areas that the network breaks down into and the core members:



The first inkling I had that Azumaya was part of a larger network was when I first met one of these *nakama* in December 2016. It was after a KdJ event, when the most loyal segment of the KdJ had converged on Azumaya. Azumaya had invited Tetsuya Ueda who runs a ‘maker’ company called Masugi specialised in Oshima pongee. Ueda-san himself is a rather self-possessed man with a steady, contemplative gaze to complement his lilting Kyoto accent – a sharp contrast with the earthiness of the local Mikawa dialect. His personal style and his wares seemed to reflect his aura of studied sophistication. Oshima pongee was once a favourite of well-to-do housewives in the Shōwa period (1926-1989). It occupies a difficult niche in that it cannot be worn for formal events or tea ceremonies, but equally it is still made of silk and therefore cannot be worn as casually as one of Azumaya’s cotton kimono. It is usually made in dark, sober colours and features minute white patterns with little variation. They are not considered to be particularly fashionable or *oshare*, but Masugi’s unorthodox designs, with cats, musical instruments and flowers, are pretty much the opposite of the Shōwa housewife’s Oshima. The informal event was an occasion for regulars to inspect Ueda-san’s wares, known in the community for their high *oshare* capital and their slightly high price tag. Owning something from Masugi, as Kyoko does for instance, is a badge of cultural capital in the fashion kimono community.

Shibakawa-san and Ueda-san put on a show for the regulars, sitting opposite each other and rolling out the bolts for everyone to see. The method is based on organic salesmanship, in that the customers can get a good look at the new items, have a think about them, and maybe ask for them later. Neither Shibakawa-san nor Ueda-san recommend any wares. If anything, they make a point not to recommend anything, marking themselves as different from ‘typical’ retailers who would push their customers to make a purchase. Rather, they prefer to watch their customers’ reactions, seeing them take pictures of their preferred bolts. This gives Shibakawa-san and Ueda-san both a sense of what customers like, and what regulars are likely to buy, and what sort of thing is likely to be popular and therefore worth making in the future.



Intrigued by the revelation that Shibakawa-san was not a lone warrior in his crusade to change the nature of the kimono industry, I asked to speak to Ueda-san at his company headquarters in Kyoto. Kyoko introduced me to Ueda-san, and I made an appointment to speak with Ueda-san a month later. I made my way into the back alleys of Shijo in Kyoto and found the company tucked away in a narrow street with other makers and companies. After greeting me courteously, Ueda-san told me about the history of his company and I was able to get an insight into how he had, in many ways, followed a parallel journey to Shibakawa-san in terms of the moral crisis that he had experienced:

It was the beginning of the 2000s, I think, that sales over the Internet began to increase. Before that all took off, we had to sell our wares to the *tonya*, so we had no idea who was buying our products in the end. The industry itself got smaller, and the chain of distribution got smaller too, and there were fewer *tonya* who would buy our things. So when you look at the Internet, you see lots of people talking about kimono. The Internet really helped us build a connection with our

customers. We made ourselves a homepage and started using Twitter which really opened up our horizons. I'd always had doubts about being in this industry and not actually wearing kimono, but I let it slide, you know? I wore suits and occasionally I wore kimono too.

Then one day, I asked someone I didn't know at all 'do you wear kimono?' They replied, 'I don't'. So I asked them why and they said, 'why are you asking *me* that? If *you* don't then why should *I*?!' I had to admit, I saw his point. So from the next day I vowed not to wear Western clothes. I began wearing kimono. It was round about that time that I started using Twitter. And I really started to understand what our customers who wear kimono think and feel about kimono. At the end of the day, when there are lots of wholesalers between the customers and us, it stops us from hearing what our customers have to say.

So I set aside for a while the question of selling or not selling, making money or not, because I felt that we had to understand what was going on with our customers. We had to set up the kind of personal networks that we need. People who make kimono, hardly any of them wear kimono. There are hardly any makers out there who wear kimono. In my mind, for us to wear them, it's like a weapon. It's an opportunity for us. We make kimono that people actually wear. And for me the ideal situation is this: we pick up on our customers' wishes and because of that we can make something worthwhile. What I hated was having to say to someone who might be a little bit interested in my things, 'this is 300,000 yen' and see the look they'd give me. So that's why we use Internet, to keep our finger on the pulse. I do Twitter and Facebook, and my wife does our Instagram page. We've got a smartphone page and one in English, too. And anyway, I've always liked all that stuff!

There are two important facets here that mirror Shibakawa-san's journey. The first is that, like Shibakawa-san, it was only when Ueda-san started wearing kimono that he began to understand their appeal. Like Shibakawa-san, something clicked for Ueda-san because he could put himself in the shoes of his customers by wearing what they wanted to buy. Like Shibakawa-san, this also triggered a strong reaction in Ueda-san which led to a full commitment to kimono and an abandonment of Western clothes. Taking this step meant that Ueda-san could demonstrate his wish to distance himself from the rest of the industry which, in the mind of the kimono fashion community, is not sufficiently dedicated to their product. He keenly felt the hypocrisy of an industry whose members have little to no personal interest in their product, and like the fashion kimono network, he feels that retailers have a duty to love their products. This is a characteristic that unites all members of the budding kimono fashion community: they must love kimono. Not

all of them wear kimono every day like Shibakawa-san and Ueda-san, but they must do so some of the time and definitely within each other's presence. Failing to do so is met with evident (though usually silent) disapproval.



The second facet is the use of Internet and social media. The Internet is a major aspect of life in the 21st century, and by participating in online forums and particularly social media, people are engaged in the creation of ‘virtual communities’ (Fox and Roberts 1999, Wilson and Peterson 2002). Debate on whether these communities are ‘real’ or ‘imagined’ and whether virtual communities can be considered ‘true communities’ dominated early anthropological work on the Internet (Calhoun in Bourdieu and Coleman 1991 and Rheingold 1994). A ‘true’ community, then, would be one that is bound to a specific physical location and whose people live in a tight-knit social group (Minar and Greer 1969). In the 2000s and 2010s, anthropologists have argued that virtual communities and real-world communities may in fact overlap (Hjorth and Kim 2005) and that is the case with the kimono fashion network as well. What happened with the kimono fashion network is that Twitter and Facebook created the possibility of forming networks that were not

bound by economic ties such as the formal, established relationship between a shop owner and a *tonya*, whose interactions would take place over the phone or in person. The Internet, and particularly SNS (Social Network Services), gives access to far more people than a retailer could meet in person.

In many ways, social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are the key to the fashion kimono network. Shibakawa-san told me that Twitter was the way he met people like Ueda-san and his other *nakama*: ‘that’s when I realised that people had *onaji omoi* (the same feelings) as me about the way the industry was run, and the same desire to change.’ Whilst a physical boundary was deemed key to mid-20th century definitions of community (see Pitt-Rivers 1954 for a classic example), this idea of a boundary persists with online communities and communities that are not bound to a place. In the case of the kimono fashion network, the members of the community place a boundary between themselves and those who do not share the same *omoi* (feelings) about kimono. It is the more informal nature of communication on social media that allowed for the communication of such feelings and ideals, and people like Shibakawa-san and Ueda-san, who felt that their views would be unpopular among the older generation that dominates the industry, were able to voice their thoughts on a platform from which the older generation was entirely absent. Other anthropologists have noted the way in which technology can produce schisms between generations: Janet McIntosh notes how for the Giriama in Kenya, text message shorthand used by younger generations is perceived as alienating by older generations (McIntosh 2010: 347). Being unable to master technology then is a major barrier to acceptance (and awareness) in the network and further widened the gap between older, more ‘traditionally’-minded retailers and younger, more fashion and lifestyle-oriented retailers. Online meetings among the younger generation (people in their 30s and early 40s) then led to offline relationships and friendships, and in turn to business relationships as well. It seems important to the retailer side of the network to emphasize that they are friends as well as business partners, and socialising in the form of visits to each other’s shops, workshops or headquarters, as well as nights out on the town drinking are regular occurrences. Equally frequent are co-organised events, promoting each other’s products, such as Shibakawa-san does for other members of the network on his weekly weekend Internet live broadcast, and commenting and liking Facebook posts and re-tweeting tweets.

It was also a chance for people in the industry, especially makers such as Ueda-san who are isolated from the customers by the wholesalers, to actually get a sense of what the users wanted.

(‘User’ is the word used at Azumaya to refer to clients, along with the word for guest or client, *okyakusan*.) The advocates of kimono-as-fashion rather than as formal wear, tend to be avid, savvy Internet users, masters of social media, regardless of whether they are retailers, craftspeople, *kitsuke* professionals or customers. The Internet is also the home of various independent kimono craftspeople, not affiliated with any ‘established’ craft workshops, whose products are usually stocked in the shops of the more open-minded Shibakawa-san and his *nakama*. Before the advent of Internet, the kimono industry was limited to communication over the phone and through fax or telegraph and, of course, in person. Internet and social media made possible the growth of virtual communities, and connection with people that makers such as Ueda-san had not heard of before. It also enabled the growth of a half private life, half work life community composed of people who are part colleague, part friend, part customer or a mix of everything. In other words, it enabled the blurring of typical roles. People stop being a customer or a colleague, and instead everyone becomes a *nakama*. This also marks them as distinct from the ‘mainstream’ kimono industry, which typically does not have a strong Internet presence and is not active on social media, and would maintain very distinct roles as retailer on one side and customer on the other. The Internet also offers a venue for competition in the sense that clever use of the Internet could provide a measure of how well-known or popular a shop or business could become. In the previous chapter I addressed how Shibakawa-san uses the Internet to do a weekly online broadcast. His show is broadcast on a number of platforms, including Youtube, and his channel currently has 6,167 followers⁴³. While most of his Youtube videos are viewed between 1000 and 2000 times, some of his videos have been viewed between 100,000 and 500,000 times. Miller and Slater have shown with the example of social media usage in Trinidad, the number of ‘hits’ on videos and social media is a way of garnering fame and renown (Miller and Slater 2000), and this is the exact same process at work. Building a presence online and cultivating partnerships online has been essential to the kimono fashion network mission to winning hearts and minds, and also customers. The network has, for example, fostered a close relationship with the site Omomuki, a website dedicated to kimono fashion that broadcasts regularly on social media. Launched in 2014, the site has over 50,000 likes on Facebook as of April 2018, and is thus a useful ally for members of the network.

Selling their goods online is also a major part of the business model of the fashion network, so much so that it is considered indispensable. The Internet and the marketing that takes place

⁴³ As of 17/12/2017.

online are also deeply intertwined with image-building for consumers. Emma Tarlo makes this point in her analysis of the TheHijabShop, an online shop which sells hijabs (headscarfs). Tarlo describes that since the beginning of the 21st century the hijab has gained ‘unprecedented popularity [...] in recent years as an object of intense religious, political, aesthetic and emotional investment’ (Tarlo 2010: 5). With Islamic fashion becoming increasingly visible and diverse, a number of online fashion sites catering to Muslims are gaining notoriety across the world. Tarlo describes one such website, TheHijabShop, which, in addition to being engaged in a savvy business venture because hijabs are cheap and easy to stock, has become so popular that Tarlo describes the shop as having had a ‘pioneering role [...] in the British context by promoting an image of a young, active and fun-loving Muslim woman who leads a modern western lifestyle while wearing hijab’ (Tarlo 2010: 212-213). The kimono fashion network, too, through their online shops, their marketing strategies and their community-building efforts through social media, shape the representations, tastes and aesthetics of their consumers, and thereby contribute to reshaping and generating kimono culture in the 21st century.

Made possible through online communication, it was this revelation that like-minded people existed in the industry and beyond that truly generated the kimono fashion network. This revelation is a recent one – only in the last six or seven years has the network formed, but the bonds between members are strong. Perhaps because they often meet in the virtual world, they recognise that each member belongs to a particular region or place, and they are keen to find out about that place. This enthusiasm for each other’s locality is evident in the Fan Meeting which took place in Yonezawa. Ima-san herself is also a frequent visitor to Azumaya and other members of the fashion network. The increase in allies moved Shibakawa-san to try and bring all these disparate elements together and meet in person. This led him to a collaboration with another shop owner called Kosugi-san and an event called ‘Kimono Carnival’. The event brought together all the retailers, craftspeople (both established and independent) and makers, *kitsuke* professionals and, importantly, customers, who believe in a fashion kimono revolution. The event itself is mainly a sales event, and every participant has a booth, regardless of how major or minor their role in the industry is. There are, at present, over one hundred members in this extended network, although the inner circle of really close friends and allies (including Azumaya) comprises about 30 people. The number of customers and fans is far greater, and difficult to estimate. Because the network is such a tight-knit community of strong personalities, the group is characterised by their own inner

alliances and tensions between members. For the good of the group these tensions are often kept under the surface and mostly an appearance of getting along is maintained.

Some of the more high-profile elements include the fun-loving Sakamoto sisters (who own a shop of the same name) and suave kimono designer Jotaro Saito. Jotaro Saito is in a league of his own, and possibly the most high-profile member of the group. He is primarily a designer, though his family was in the kimono industry for generations. He designs kimono but also interiors that are used in hotels and establishments throughout Japan and beyond. He is currently the only kimono designer and stylist to take part in Tokyo fashion week every year. I was able to meet Jotaro Saito at the kimono shop Kawahiraya in Toyota (see Chapter 3) in May 2016 where he had brought many of his wares for a special event showcasing his kimono. I reflected at the time that his modern, chic designs and iridescent colour schemes, that put you in mind of beetle wings and hummingbirds, seemed out of place in the somewhat staid atmosphere of Kawahiraya and its well-to-do clientele, many of whom were not doubt baffled by Saito-san's kimono. Saito-san's kimono are expensive, easily going into the 1 million yen range (£6746), but vastly different than formal kimono. His kimono cannot truly be said to belong to the kimono canon at all. He was gracious with me and gave me much of his time. He told me,

Times have changed. That's a fact. Formal kimono like the *hōmongi* may very well die out. But that's not necessarily a bad thing. Now is the time when it's all changing. It might be a way for the kimono to 'reload', in a sense, to start again. In Japan, everything's changing now: food, clothing, buildings; and things that can't change end up in museums. Doing things that have already been done, that's the easiest thing. That's the difference between a craftspeople and a creator, you know? Before, craftspeople would stress the colour and pattern of their kimono, but as a designer I can put forward the *style* of my kimono. That's why I also do interior designs and settings. You have to be able to set things to music, to give your work an atmosphere that appeals. Old craftsmen can't do that, however beautifully they can paint a flower. They can only do one thing.

Like many in the kimono fashion network, Saito-san was not pessimistic about the economic crisis and the potential fall of the 'old guard' of the kimono fashion network. He saw change as not just inevitable, but desirable.

There will be fewer and fewer people wearing it. But in a way, the market for kimono being so small helped me carve out a place for myself. You have to market your things, and fashion shows are risky, but the market being so small now has allowed me to carve out a place for myself. The market shrinking isn't such a bad thing – it means there is no such thing as new things entering the market. It's only ever a kimono market. It means you have a solid system. It's going to get smaller, but it's not going to disappear. There will always be demand. It's a special market. I know I cater to 'kimono maniacs'⁴⁴.



Saito-san does indeed seem to have done well for himself. He takes his kimono to Tokyo Fashion Week⁴⁵ every year and he has recently opened a kimono shop and café named 'Ginza Six' in the Ginza district of Tokyo, renowned for its luxury brands. Another key high-profile figure in the network is Kōichi Fujii who runs a tie-dye craft workshop in Kyoto called Fujii Shibori⁴⁶. This prestigious old business produces some of the most coveted wares in the kimono fashion network. Less modern and sleek than Saito-san's wares, the tie-dye wares of Fujii Shibori are renowned more for the difficult techniques used in their making, such as the *sekka-shibori* or snowflake tie-

⁴⁴ The word '*maniakku*' is derived from the English 'maniac': someone with an intense, perhaps overly keen interest in something.

⁴⁵ Tokyo Fashion Week 2016: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zI8K_hwJ1O4 (retrieved 14/02/2018).

⁴⁶ <http://fujiihibori.jp/> (retrieved 14/02/2018).

dye. I visited his stately home in Kyoto, where he showed me his workers in the business' modest storefront, and also the quiet garden at the back of the estate. Below are pictures of the craftspeople at Fujii Shibori, and a picture of Fujii-san and myself.



Thoughtful *obijime* craftsman Hiroharu Fujioka⁴⁷ is also a key member, and unlike Saito-san or Fujii-san, he is a craftsman specialised in making *obijime*, the thin belts that go around the obi. Designated a Master Craftsman (see Chapter 3), the wares he produces in his small workshop in Iga with his mother and his wife are handmade and also much coveted by the network. Given the work that goes into them and their quality, they are quite expensive: around 20,000 to 30,000 yen (£135 to £202). Fujioka's kindness and modest nature has earned him a special place in the network. On the last day of the Kimono Salone (see Chapter 6), he pressed a handwoven butterfly in my hand and told me 'good luck with your studies'. Below are pictures of his workshop.



⁴⁷ <http://www.ict.ne.jp/~obihime/> (retrieved 14/02/2018)



Other members include the dynamic and enterprising Kazue Takahashi. She runs a business specialised in kimono undergarments in Kesenuma. Kesenuma is in Miyagi prefecture, one of the places where the March 11th 2011 earthquake and tsunami hit the hardest. For generations, Takahashi-san's family were in the business of *shikkai* – the care and maintenance of kimono that involved, among other things, cleaning and repairs. At the time of the disaster, Takahashi-san's shop was severely damaged by the tsunami. She and her staff survived, but the damage done to her shop was so extensive that she initially closed her business, unsure that she would be able to recover. However, she soon started to receive a lot of custom from people bringing her mud and water-damaged kimono for repair, and this clientele was sufficiently extensive that she was able to reopen her business. I met Takahashi-san at the Kimono Salone event in September 2016 (see Chapter 6) and she told me, tears in her eyes, how a customer came to her with a damaged kimono and told her, 'this kimono belonged to my mother. Please, is there anything that you can do to save

it?’ She now specialises in kimono underwear and accessories, and her wares are highly popular among the kimono fashion network.

Another member of the group is Yoshihiro Katō, who runs Fuji Kōbō Wassai Gakuin – a *wassai* (sewing Japanese clothing) school. Katō-san is a *mukoyōshi* – a man who takes his wife’s name and takes on her family business. This is still quite a common practice in Japan, and in the case of family businesses in which there are no sons, it enables the family line to continue since the man marries into the family and takes their name, thus passing it on to his wife’s children children. Others in the network are in this situation also – Fujii-san, for instance, is also a *mukoyōshi*. While Katō-san runs the affairs of the school, his wife sews and teaches apprentices to sew. *Wassai* is a skill that few people in modern Japan possess. The workshop is doing quite well, with two branches in Chiba prefecture (near Tokyo) and one in Kyoto. When I visited their Kyoto branch, I was able to see Katō-san’s wife using a technique called *otokojitate* (literally, ‘male tailoring’), so named because the tailor uses her/his feet to keep the cloth in place as they sew it, and this style was preferred by male tailors.



There is also renowned *kitsuke* professional Akiko Yoshizawa, but also many independent craftspeople and retailers who do not come from a long line of kimono shop owners or craftspeople. These include *rōketsu* (batik) dye artist whose brand-name Chiesu is well-known in the kimono fashion network, and Michina Nakagawa, who owns the independent design shop Berry Kōbō.

Many of the members of the network met either through social media or at the Kimono Carnival. The Carnival has run for six years, and each year the number of visitors to the event increases. New members make their wish to participate known and customers who discover the event and are inducted into the idea that the kimono can be worn for fashion all increase membership in the community. The Carnival caught Ima-san's eye, and she became a part of the extended network after visiting one of the early Carnivals. Her approval and patronage has also boosted the network's reach, extending it to Ima-san's readers.

The network may have its core members, such as Ima-san, Shibakawa-san, Yoshizawa-sensei and Fujii-san, but their approach is not to exclude lower profile independent craftspeople. As a result, their members comprise the most traditional of craftspeople (such as Hiroharu Fujioka) alongside independent artists and craftspeople whose interests, rather than families, brought them to the industry. The Kimono Carnival invites all these members and does not bar access to the non-traditional independents. This is highly unorthodox in an industry in which shops and craftspeople are evaluated according to how many generations of their family have been in the business. Shibakawa-san told me, only half-jokingly, that the traditionalists in the industry 'only begin to take you seriously if you have been around for 100 years or more'.

As a result, this organic growth in members has steadily bolstered numbers in the kimono fashion network. Whilst still a very small segment of the Japanese population, it has indubitably grown in the last 6 years, and there is evidence that it will continue to do so. Particularly since the popularity of the Kimono Carnival came to the attention of the mainstream kimono industry, and Shibakawa-san was offered the opportunity to take over a major kimono event in Tokyo in 2016 called the Kimono Salone. The Kimono Salone was in fact a long-standing annual event which was failing to draw a crowd. The organisers hoped that bringing in Shibakawa-san and the kimono fashion network would revive the event and draw his crowd of fashion kimono-wearers. The gamble paid off, and the event was successful, as I will discuss in the next chapter. It did, however, mean that Shibakawa-san had to compromise on the tone of the event that he would normally choose, since the Salone featured both the kimono fashion network and members of the 'traditional'

industry, and Shibakawa-san could not simply reproduce the relaxed, friendly atmosphere of the Carnival.

The 2016 Kimono Salone was the biggest event that the fashion network had organised to date, a major endeavour bringing together 80 different shops, designers and craftspeople, from both established and independent backgrounds (with independents craftspeople affectionately referred to as ‘indies’) members of the industry, both from the mainstream kimono industry and from the kimono fashion network. It was also reportedly the biggest kimono event to date.

Additionally, Shibakawa-san and his network caught the eye of the Ministry for Economy Trade and Industry (METI), more specifically the Lifestyle Industries Division. This division of METI has launched a Committee for the Study on Japanese Dress whose specific focus is finding ways to revive the kimono industry and raise public interest in the kimono. I went to METI in Tokyo to interview Hiroyuki Imari and Takuma Sato, two of the people in charge of textiles and Japanese dress in particular. The Division seemed particularly interested in the rise of the kimono as fashion wear and had conducted in-depth surveys to monitor the changes. One of these was conducted online in 2015, and aimed at ascertaining who wears kimono, why and when. Among their most interesting findings was that while 32% of women in their 20s said they had only worn a kimono once in their lives, 12.6% said that they wore kimono several times a year. This contrasted most sharply with women in their 40s, for whom only 7.6% wore kimono several times in the year. Further, women in their 20s showed the highest rate of use for sightseeing and travelling, a fact reflected in Japan’s booming kimono rental industry in major tourist cities such as Kyoto. These rental shops cater not just for foreign tourists, but domestic consumers as well. By contrast, the highest type of use for women in their 50s were cultural activities such as tea ceremony, going to the theatre or visiting a museum. The survey concluded that women in their 20s and 30s showed the strongest wish to wear the kimono: 79.9% for women in their 20s compared to 50.3% for women in their 50s (METI 2015). Many members of the kimono fashion network, such as Shibakawa-san, Ima-san and Jotaro Saito have become members of the Committee to advise the Division, and future collaboration with the government seems likely.

In this way, the network has managed to extend their influence beyond the confines of their own group and into both the mainstream kimono industry and the government. Though a small group, their passion and dynamism appeals, as does the enthusiasm of their customers. In the next section, I will pay closer attention to what unites the members of the community in terms

of the discourse produced by the kimono fashion network. Drawing on Etienne Wenger's concept of a 'community of practice' (Wenger 1999), I will examine what it means to be a member of the community and what their 'practice' consists of. I will pay attention to how the fashion network perceives their practice of wearing the kimono as a lifestyle choice, and how they craft this lifestyle based on shared ideas about taste, authenticity and knowledge. I will also pay attention to the importance, already alluded to, of creating a more horizontally structured community in which roles are not rigidly adhered to.

2. 'My customers are my friends': crafting a community of practice based on consumption, taste and knowledge

There is of course one thing that brings the entire community together, and that is wearing the kimono. One of the barriers to wearing the kimono, as was often explained to me, was not having many occasions to wear it. The Kimono de Jack group was set up to solve this problem and get people who like wearing the kimono together. Kimono de Jack is not the only group like this. Kimono de Ginza, a group of people who enjoy wearing kimono in the Ginza area of Tokyo, are also similar, and I also witnessed people unaffiliated to any group who had formed friendship groups based around wearing the kimono. Kyoko described KdJ to me as a kind of safety mechanism for people who wanted to wear the kimono but were embarrassed to go out in public wearing them, or as she put it, *hito no me ha ki ni suru* (to be aware of people's gaze). Having others around them, people with the same interest, was a way for them to feel a little less self-conscious.



I experienced this keenly myself, since as a white woman wearing a kimono I was particularly conspicuous in public, but once I was with the members of KdJ I became ‘normal’ and the other members acted as a buffer between me and wider Japanese society. The members, particularly those who have been in the ‘lifestyle’ for a while, are full of tips and advice, and stout encouragement to be bolder about wearing the kimono in public.

Typically, people would assume that anyone wearing a kimono has a reason to be wearing one: maybe they are going to a wedding or perhaps they practise a traditional art like tea ceremony. The usual question people ask a group of people wearing kimono (and Japanese people, particularly older women, are not shy to approach strangers and talk to them) is *nanika arimasu ka?* which means ‘is there something on today?’ Ima-san suggests that the answer should be ‘nothing. This is just what I like to wear’.

Of course, the kimono that KdJ members choose to wear might fall into the ‘casual’ end of the kimono canon spectrum, but the choices that members make when they get dressed are anything but casual. I witnessed this again in a most personal manner, since when I first approached KdJ, I was wearing Western clothes and I made a rather major faux-pas in that my first meeting with them was in Western clothes and everyone was wearing a kimono. The awkwardness I felt led me to invest properly in learning how to wear a kimono. At that time I only had a relatively cheap (and ill-fitting) polyester kimono (which I grew to hate), with only the most basic of accessories, and little room (or understanding of) the breadth of customization available, particularly to KdJ members who play around with the kimono canon so much. Whilst I loved the kimono I saw people around me wear, initially I did not consider that I could, ever, make the kimono my own. It was Japanese, I reasoned, and therefore could not be mine. Besides, it was not designed for my large, Western European frame, so different from the typically smaller, lighter Japanese woman’s frame. As it turned out, Japanese people, and KdJ members in particular, were not concerned by this, nor did they consider my foreignness to be an obstacle. Even my frame itself, which is objectively at the upper limit of what a kimono can fit, was usually seen more as a project (or possibly a challenge) rather than a problem. Whilst some may well have kept their opinions to themselves about whether or not it suited me, they were most eager for me to wear it and share their passion for it.



As I became a regular attendant, I would usually go together with Kyoko and Takashi, as well as other friends. Often I would stay over at Kyoko and Takashi's the night before and I would get to witness the degree of preparation and thought that went into both their outfits. I would bring my rag-tag collection of kimono pieces, which Kyoko would thoughtfully observe and then pull out a sash or decoration from her own collection for me to wear. Often, she had some ready to give to me as well, since she makes her own glass ornaments, particularly *netsuke* which are hung from the *obi*. Seeing her things, and her skills, made me wish for some of my own. The more often I attended, the more I wanted the objects that would reflect true skill and truly reflect the style and taste of the KdJ community and the kimono fashion network. I would acquire items that I initially loved, only to realise I had nothing to wear them with. I particularly rued my experiments with polyester kimono which, while cheap, I found to be cold in winter and hot in summer. I also grew

to understand what people meant when they said that polyester does not ‘stick to your body’ in the way cotton or silk does. Cotton seems to cling tightly and silk is heavy and slippery and warm, but polyester, as the Japanese say *karada ni najimanai*: it does not fit with the body. The characters for the verb *najimu* are 馴染む which is a combination of ‘to become used to’ and ‘to dye’. ‘Dyeing’ in the Japanese context also has the connotation of ‘to be changed’ or ‘transformed’. It is said for instance that new brides wear white to show their willingness to be ‘dyed’ the colour of their husband’s household. It is also possible to ‘be dyed’ by someone or by a culture, indicating influence that has the power to alter something or someone’s essence itself. Polyester’s inability to ‘fit in’ with the body is often attributed to its qualities as an artificial man-made textile. Even among KdJ members, who preferred affordable products to expensive ones, polyester had few advocates. Kyoko told me not to worry too much about the money I felt I had wasted: ‘Consider it your *benkyō-dai* (learning fee). Everyone has to go through that phase in order to understand what really works and what really suits them. You start by wanting everything, and then you develop the skills to tell what’s good and what’s not, and what’s worth buying’. I like to think I went some way to achieving that ability, but what I do know for sure is that I was thoroughly dyed by the colours of KdJ and the kimono fashion network, and not least by Kyoko. Like other members of the kimono fashion network, I myself was inducted into the KdJ community by Kyoko and, through Kyoko and Shibakawa-san, to the wider kimono fashion network. It is a process of enculturation, defined by Margaret Mead as the ‘process of learning a culture in all its uniqueness and particularity’ (Mead quoted in Schwartz 1976: 11) and in terms of methodology it had much in common with the method of becoming an apprentice. Michael Coy writes that ‘from a dramaturgical perspective, apprenticeship as a field method has the investigator joining the cast rather than watching the performance’ (Coy 1989: 129). Although I was not learning a craft as most apprentices do, I was learning the embodied practice of taste through learning to master the kimono and the accoutrements preferred by the kimono fashion network.

Like many inductees I also felt that urge to belong, and that belonging was mediated through consumption. To have that lifestyle is to consume, but it is much more than just that: it is a practice (wearing the kimono) that cannot be truly mastered without first being able to wear the kimono and second, understanding the codes of taste that dominate the KdJ community.



These are in part a reaction against the kimono canon that the older generation of women in their 50s and 60s (such as the women described in chapter 2) would adhere to. I realised how deep the dye had gone when I went back to my field site in Toyota in September 2017. I stayed once more with my host mother Sachiko, who had organised an event for the local women I had interviewed in the neighbourhood and who had shown me their *tansu* and their kimono.

I got ready at Sachiko's, and I was dressed to impress: purple cotton kimono with seven coloured thread woven through the textile, stiff *hakata* obi with a large *obidome* accessory, coloured lace *tabi* socks (anathema to the kimono canon which says that *tabi* should be white) and, one of my favourites, a lace *usubaori* (a light overcoat). As we prepared to leave, Sachiko took one look at me and sniggered. Self-conscious, I asked her why. She told me, 'it's so over the top!' Embarrassed, I removed the *usubaori* – it was made from fabric I had bought with Kyoko in a textiles shop and she had one identical to mine. It was one of my favourite items and had received much praise from the KdJ members (getting praise is one of the main objectives of dressing up well), but to Sachiko's generation it seemed almost comically excessive. Even without it, the

women from my neighbourhood did not fail to comment on my coloured *tabi* and collar decorations. It was really only in that moment that I realised just how much I had been ‘dyed’ by the tastes of the kimono fashion network.



KdJ is but one of the multiple overlapping communities that form the kimono fashion network, but the process by which people join KdJ is similar and indeed overlaps with joining the wider movement. Etienne Wenger’s concept of ‘community of practice’ is helpful here in unravelling what exactly is going on at the heart of the kimono fashion network. Based on the idea that learning often takes place as a social activity, Etienne Wenger coined the term ‘community of practice’ to designate a group of people who share a particular activity, craft, profession or practice (Wenger 1998: 45). Wenger identifies three aspects to a community of practice: first of all, members must share ‘mutual engagement’, that is to say relationships and social involvement with each other. Second, they must have a ‘joint enterprise’ which is their practice, craft, profession, etc. Lastly, they have a ‘shared repertoire’ which is their collective discourse, concepts, repertoire, tools, etc. (Wenger 1998: 73). As part of their shared repertoire, they might also have a sense of their own history, that is to say, the events and stories that led to the creation of their particular community.

I find this concept particularly salient to the kimono fashion network since, unlike traditional communities that were place-based, the kimono fashion network is not bound to a single place but rather to the practice of wearing the kimono as fashion and wearing the kimono as a lifestyle choice. The ‘mutual engagement’ in the kimono fashion network happens face to face, but it also takes place online. Sub-groups form based on friendships and particular affinities for certain types of kimono over others, but the practice in essence is always the same: kimono are worn. This is the ‘joint enterprise’, but it is not limited to just wearing kimono: kimono are blogged about, photographed, displayed on Instagram, shown to friends and, most importantly, kimono are bought. Consumption is the motor upon which the entire enterprise of the kimono fashion network rests. There are providers and ‘users’ in the network, although most of the providers strive to break down the barriers that exist between them and their customers. The practice of this community is in fact a lifestyle that involves wearing the kimono to varying degrees: either every day or once a month or every two months.

Lifestyle is a core feature of life in modern societies, and much of what makes the project of creating a certain lifestyle possible rests on goods and consumption. It is also intimately tied with the project of self-creation and the generation of identity and belonging. As Bendle notes, there is a sense across the board in the social sciences that creating and generating identity is both ‘vital and problematic under high modernity’ (Bendle 2002: 1). One of the ways in which this generation of identity is possible in modern societies is through the generation of lifestyle. Trentmann notes, lifestyle lies at ‘the very core of self-identity, its making and remaking’ (Trentmann 2006: 16). Lifestyles tend to focus on items or objects: cars, motorbikes, clothes, etc. Being a consumer is a core component of generating a lifestyle, and thus a key part in the project of creating the self. Mike Featherstone argues that it is this proliferation and sheer diversity of goods that has enabled such a multitude of lifestyles to proliferate (Featherstone 2007: 96). Sociologists and anthropologists such as Daniel Miller have argued that, taken in its most positive sense, consumer culture and mass consumption is the key that enables projects of selfhood and expressions of the self but also expressions of belonging to a group that would be nigh impossible to express without it.

With regards to leisure activities and pursuits, Japan has been referred to as the ‘consumer society *par excellence*’ (Manzenreiter and Horne 2006: 412) due to the extent to which leisure goods and services are commercialized in Japan. Manzenreiter and Horne argue that since markets

are differentiated to a great extent in Japan, based on gender, lifestyle, taste and other factors, this has enabled a particularly powerful connection between certain consumer goods and identity, especially with regards to group belonging and a sense of community (Manzenreiter and Horne 2006: 413). A further characteristic of the interlocking of consumption and identity in Japan can be found in what Featherstone calls the ‘aestheticization of modern life’, which he takes to be a ‘preoccupation with customizing a lifestyle and stylistic self-consciousness’ (Featherstone 2007: 98). He further argues that the word lifestyle ‘connotes individuality, self-expression, and a stylistic self-consciousness. One’s body, clothes, speech, leisure pastimes, eating and drinking preferences, home, car, choice of holidays, etc. are to be regarded as indicators of the individuality of taste and sense of style of the owner/consumer (Featherstone 2007: 96). The kimono fashion network and their lifestyle of kimono wearing, their community of practice, very much display this concern with aesthetics and taste.

For most of the 20th century, however, the kimono lay somewhat outside of the realm of lifestyle: it was considered as something that *had* to be worn at particular times, such as weddings, coming of age ceremonies, school entrance and graduation ceremonies or for cultural pursuits such as tea ceremony or flower arranging (Valk 2017). It has even been said that the kimono was not subject to fashion, or that if it was, it was a much slower moving and altogether different fashion than the frenzied, ever-changing world of fashion for Western clothes. It seems that what the kimono fashion network has achieved is to align the kimono with a modern lifestyle choice. The kimono of the kimono fashion network, then, are much more in line with modern consumption markets and practices than the traditional, formal kimono sold by the vast majority of the kimono retail industry, whose marketing strategy was built on the idea that somehow kimono were outside of ‘ordinary’ consumption in Japan and thus not subject to its rules. The fashion network, on the other hand, uses language very much associated with consumption-based lifestyles and practices. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Shibakawa-san and the other members of the network speak of having a ‘kimono *laifu*’ (life) and how best to enjoy one’s ‘kimono *laifu*’. The sentiment that members of the network have is that their way of doing things is very different from the established kimono canon, as it is based on interest, passion and enthusiasm, in the modern sense of a hobby-based lifestyle. The best example of this way of thinking occurred when I went with Aichi KdJ to the Toyota Automobile Museum in late May 2016. We toured the entire museum and we were taking a rest in the café, which overlooked a huge car park filled with period Toyota

Celicas (a kind of sports car manufactured by Toyota since the 1970s). Kyoko was observing the drivers, who were milling around the car park, and she remarked absently, ‘I don’t get it. Why are they all just standing there, doing nothing? What’s the point?’ Her husband Takashi replied, ‘that’s exactly the point. They’re scoping each other’s cars out, looking at what other people have. It’s just like KdJ and our kimono. We hang out to compare ourselves, to see what other people have got.’ Kyoko laughed. ‘Ok, I get it now! That makes perfect sense.’

In fact, *kimono laifu* has much in common with other consumer object-based lifestyles, such as cars or biking. John Schouten and James McAlexander explored the Harley-Davidson biker lifestyle in America, which they call a ‘subculture of consumption’ (Schouten and McAlexander 1995). They define this as ‘a distinctive subgroup of society that self-selects on the basis of a shared commitment to a particular product class, brand, or consumption activity’ with ‘an identifiable, hierarchical social structure’ and ‘a unique ethos, or set of shared beliefs and values; an unique jargons, rituals, and modes of symbolic expression’ (Schouten and McAlexander 1995: 43). This comparison between the kimono and the motorbike is not entirely innocent: one of my research participants, Takashi Onoda, is a car and motorbike enthusiast. My fieldwork happened to coincide with his long-anticipated acquisition of a Harley-Davidson motorbike. Takashi was intensely committed to all of his hobbies: photography (he is KdJ and Shibakawa-san’s pro bono photographer, producing professional-standard photographs), kimono, cars and bikes. Lumping kimono in with these lifestyles may appear strange at first but together they form a coherent whole, showing Takashi’s tastes and his appetite for getting to grips with an object, understanding its ins and outs, getting the very best quality of everything (high quality cameras, Harley-Davidsons and Oshima or *sekka-shibori* (snowflake tie-dye) kimono) and, of course, consuming each object. Together these hobbies form a complete picture and are highly revelatory of how Takashi constructs his identity through consumption and consumption-based lifestyles. Overleaf are two selfies Takashi has taken.





Interestingly, John Schouten and James McAlexander went through a very similar induction into the Harley biker lifestyle as I did into the kimono lifestyle. They noted that becoming an active participant in the lifestyle and committing to it was a key feature of their three years of research: ‘we gained insights and perspectives that would have been difficult, if not impossible, to achieve through less sustained involvement’ (Schouten and McAlexander 1995: 44). Just as I did, they found themselves sucked into the lifestyle and they also found that it became their own lifestyle:

The more we integrated motorcycling and related activities into our daily consumption patterns the better we understood the nuances of the biker's lifestyle and identity. An unanticipated outcome of our increased ethnographic involvement was that we became motorcycle enthusiasts. Two or three days without riding a motorcycle brings on a yearning to ride.

Schouten and McAlexander 1995: 46

To demonstrate commitment to the lifestyle, you have to talk the talk and walk the walk, and this means of course that you have to consume. Schouten and McAlexander had to make the major financial commitment of each buying a Harley-Davidson motorbike⁴⁸. In my case I went through that stage relatively unconsciously and it was only afterwards that I realised that the decision to consume marked a major milestone in commitment which is positively received by other members.

The third aspect of the community of practice, the ‘shared repertoire’, is what I will pay closer attention to here. The shared repertoire for the kimono fashion community consists of *their* way of wearing the kimono. In the context of contemporary Japan, there is a pre-existing way of wearing the kimono, which is the one that came into existence after World War Two when the kimono retreated from the sphere of day to day life and instead became used only as formal and ceremonial wear for important life events. As women gradually lost the ability to put on the kimono themselves, they became forced to learn kimono dressing from *kitsuke* schools (Valk 2017). The *kitsuke* schools were instrumental in establishing the ‘kimono canon’ and fixing rules for wearing the kimono. They made these rules appear unbreakable, and this contributed to a list of things to

⁴⁸ The cheapest in the range cost around £6000. The most expensive are over £30,000. From http://www.maidstoneharleydavidson.co.uk/harley_davidson/new-bikes/price-list.htm (10/11/2017).

wear or not wear according to the seasons. Typical guidelines mean that a kimono with lining (called an *awase*) can be worn from October to late May. An unlined kimono (*hitoe*) can be worn during June and September. At the height of summer, July and August, there are usually two different types of summer kimono, *sha* and *ro*. These kimono are slightly see-through and have had threads pulled during the weaving with the idea that this will make the kimono cooler in the heavy humidity of summer. These rules are not just applicable to the kimono themselves, however. Obi and accessories must all follow these rules, too, and as such there are summer obi, *obiage* (obi scarves), *obijime* (obi belts), summer underkimono and *haneri* (underkimono collar covers). In addition, there are also *yukata*, light summer kimono that are worn for summer festivals and provided by ryokan (traditional Japanese inns). Attention is paid not just to the parts of the outfit but also the effect they have as a whole. Colour is highly important in this, and kimono aficionados would talk at great length about the effect of the *obiage* scarf and the merits of having one which contrasts with the outfit as a whole. This is referred to as *sashi-iro* and the term is usually applied to an item of clothing or accessory the colour of which contrasts with the entire outfit. A fully put-together outfit is referred to as a *kōde*, a shortened version of ‘coordinate’. Customisation of the kimono outfit through *haneri* and obi decorations is a key part of generating an eye-catching *kōde*. Half the fun of going to KdJ events, for instance, is thinking in advance of what to wear. And as Kyoko told me, good etiquette is not to blurt out in front of others which part of the outfit is new, different, playful or bold. You have to wait for people to spot it and compliment you. Exchanging compliments and demonstrating that you have noticed others’ choice is also a major part of the kimono fashion movement. Putting together an outfit is as much for others as it is for yourself. Some were so taken with this wish to be noticed and complimented that they would go out of their way to find quite outlandish accessories and bold colours that could not help but draw the eye.

Another major rule in the kimono canon which the fashion network has to take a stand on concerns the use of the obi. There are three major types of obi: the *fukuro* obi, the Nagoya obi and the *hanhaba* obi. The first two are quite similar. *Fukuro* obi are the longest and are most usually worn with formal kimono for ceremonies. Nagoya obi are not too different from *fukuro* obi but they are usually shorter and stitched in a slightly different way. They are also usually less brightly patterned and tend to be far less formal. This is because of the way they are tied. *Fukuro* obi are tied using the formal *ni-ju daiko* (two fold *taiko*) tie, whereas Nagoya obi are tied using a simple ‘one fold’ *taiko* tie. It takes quite a lot of knowledge of kimono wearing to be able to tell the

difference between the two when they are folded, and even more so once they are tied around the body. The *hanhaba* is easiest to tell apart. Its name means ‘half-width’, and that is exactly what it is: only half the width of the *fukuro* or Nagoya obi. The canon dictates that while *fukuro*-obi are for formal kimono, Nagoya obi are for semi-formal kimono, *hanhaba* obi can only be worn with *yukata* (light summer kimono). Wearing a kimono in contemporary Japan invariably involves relating to the kimono canon and its forms in some way, and failing to conform to the canon is taken to be a lack of knowledge or understanding. However, this can usually only be judged by those who are in the know, since the vast majority of Japanese people know that there are rules governing how to wear the kimono, but not what these rules actually are. Mostly, the people who do know are middle-aged women who practise some kind of traditional art such as tea ceremony. They also tend to be the people most insistent on the idea that the kimono canon rules are unbreakable. In actual fact, in my experience of talking to *kitsuke* professionals in particular, the kimono canon varies considerably depending on each person. What does not vary is the sense that the rules must be respected and, if they are not, then the kimono is not being worn properly. The kimono canon is, in essence, about taste. Pierre Bourdieu famously argued that taste is a form of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986 in Szeman and Kaposy 2011) and is both predetermined by class *and* reinforces class belonging. Following Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital, it could be argued that the kimono canon represents a form of cultural capital. While there are certainly class-based elements to the kimono canon, the rules seem to transcend class barriers and thus it would seem that the sense of taste in the kimono canon is not completely bound by class.

As wearers of the kimono, members of the kimono fashion network have to find their feet with regards to the kimono canon. Many are suspicious of the rules of the canon, particularly those regarding the seasons. Some suspect (and probably with good reason) the industry of creating as many different kimono as possible and as many rules about when and where to wear what, so as to encourage women to spend whilst erring on the side of caution and avoid being judged by others. Ima-san in particular is a vocal critic of the season rules. Stating that she is an *atsugariya* (someone who tends to feel hot all the time), she mostly wears summer hemp underkimono. She argues that kimono should be worn according to what makes you feel comfortable, and not what the rules dictate. The kimono fashion network tends to collectively question the rules, and a frequently given argument for breaking the seasonal rules is that global warming is making the months of May and June hotter. As such, they tend to wear their *hitoe* kimono longer than the rules state. They might

also wear *hitoe* through the months of July and August, claiming that having a *ro* or *sha* kimono made just for two months is a waste of money.

Possibly the most diagnostic sign to detect a member of the kimono fashion network is their use of the *hanhaba* obi all year round with kimono, rather than only with *yukata* during the summer. This is usually the starkest disavowal of the rules of the kimono canon. It also enables a far greater freedom for its users, since the *hanhaba* obi can be tied according to the wearer's fancy, rather than a fixed form such as with the Nagoya obi or the *fukuro* obi. By generating a specific canon of their own that both builds on and challenges the already established kimono canon, the kimono fashion network fosters its own sense of taste which is key to their lifestyle. Antoine Hennion has questioned the notion that taste is always bound up with class. Instead of considering taste to be an attribute, he argues, taste should be thought of as an activity, one which must be learnt and acquired (Hennion 2007: 101). Taste, then, is acquired socially, and not necessarily by members of a particular class. In the case of the kimono fashion network, it is acquired by members of a community defined by their lifestyle and practice. Featherstone has also stressed this reflexive aspect of taste and lifestyle creation:

Rather than unreflexively adopting a lifestyle, through tradition or habit, the new heroes of consumer culture make lifestyle a project and display their individuality and sense of style in the particularity of the assemblage of goods, clothes, practices, experiences, appearance and bodily dispositions they design together into a lifestyle. The modern individual within consumer culture is made conscious that he speaks not only with his clothes, but with his home, furnishings, interior decoration, car and other activities which are to be read and classified in terms of the presence and absence of taste.

Featherstone 2007: 99

If we take as our starting point that taste, as a 'collective technique', is a reflexive process in which people train themselves to be sensitive to a particular taste (Hennion 2007: 98), then the members of the kimono fashion network must learn the techniques of taste. In the case of the kimono fashion network, this involves both the physical practice of wearing kimono and the taste of their particular community of practice. This translates to levels of skills and ability that are visible to those who know what to look for: symmetrical overlapping collars, obi that are tied not too loose and not too tight, levels of comfort walking, sitting, and getting into cars, etc. New

members are likely to betray themselves not just through their dressing mistakes but also their movements and general physical disposition. Members speak of skill and technique, of how long it takes them to put on a kimono (female members in particular, since the process is longer and more complex than for men), what they find difficult, their preferences, and so on. Members who are more confident than others offer advice or, in case there is a wardrobe malfunction, pull aside the person and help them fix the problem. Kimono and obi are observed, touched, pulled, tweaked and re-arranged constantly, by the wearer themselves or by others (often without permission). Members also need occasions during which they can exercise their practice. This is where events such as KdJ come in. Members learn the techniques of wearing kimono – the practice – and also the tastes of the kimono fashion network gradually, and with varying degrees of skill.

Learning taste is possibly more subtle than learning the actual techniques of wearing a kimono. First, doing so requires understanding what the kimono canon is and understanding why the kimono fashion network deviates from it, but also *feeling*, on an emotional level, that this deviation is the right way to wear the kimono: our way – fashionable, modern, individual. Gatherings are always an occasion to be seen, and to flaunt how well one has mastered the trends and styles of the community, but also one's knowledge of the techniques. Willingness to spend, but also savvy use of money and demonstrations of thrift (such as second-hand purchases or making things yourself) are all taken to reflect the depth of dedication to the lifestyle. Mixing with members of the fashion network, I was privy to two observations: the first was how much thought went into all the outfits. I watched Kyoko (with whom I travelled) agonise over her choice of kimono and obi, eventually opting to take a complete change of outfit for each day. Many participants did the same, changing every day. At the time, the best I had in terms of kimono was something I had bought before I met Shibakawa-san. I had had it made out of cloth I had bought in a textile and fabric shop in Nagoya, mistakenly believing that this would be cheaper than kimono fabric. I had also been led to believe that I was simply too tall (and doubtless too wide as well) to fit into a kimono. Both of these facts turned out not to be true, and it was only several months later that I acquired my Azumaya-made kimono that suited me without ruining me. At the time, however, my unorthodox kimono attracted a lot of attention, one woman even asking me directly whether or not the fabric was designed for kimono or not. Everyone was subject to scrutiny. Choices are approved of or criticized, and as such taste was always in flux. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Walton, in their analysis of domestic spaces and object and their role in the

creation of the self, state that objects can be simultaneously used both as means of differentiation (making a person stand out) but also as a means of social integration (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Walton 1981: 33). The world of taste in the kimono fashion network fully reflects that duality. The network promotes the same discourse that Azumaya does: wearing the kimono is about expressing one's *shumi* (preferences) and *konomi* (likes), but it's also about being *oshare* (stylish) and *jibunrashisa* (being oneself) or having *kosei* (individuality). In other words, everyone is searching for their particular style and choose to express it through the kimono, and they do so with regards to the communal sense of taste that the fashion network cultivates. This pursuit of individual style ultimately serves to reinforce their sense of belonging (and does so even if their style is disapproved of) since 'the cultivation of individuality serves a larger goal of integration because the intention to differentiate oneself from others still needs other people to give it meaning' (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Walton 1981: 33).

The process of integrating the fashion network's community of practice is organic, something that I was keenly aware of since, acquiring close friends in the network such as Kyoko, I was also being gently, slowly inducted into the community. My wish to learn naturally drove my desire to acquire both the physical techniques and the taste codes that would align me with the kimono fashion network, to which members naturally responded favourably, answered my questions, giving me gifts and taking me to special events where I was likely to find things I liked. I wasn't pushed or coerced, but with each event I was inducted. And I wanted to be. It is because the dynamic of entering a community of practice, learning the practice and committing to its lifestyle, is intensely rewarding that people create these communities. While there may be tension, worry and conflict in communities of taste and practice, there is also pleasure, reward and companionship. Hennion uses mountain climbers as an example of taste:

[...] nothing remains but the pleasure of doing what is being done, the stereotypical character of each one, the jokes, and of course, the interminable discussion on this or that passage, the traps, the movements to make, the way to place oneself, the rest stops. Before their cliff, the only important thing for a moment, for humans together like this, is common practice.

Hennion 2007: 99

The practice of being together, engaging in the same practice, engenders a flow state which triggers positive emotions and a sense of being bonded to the community. Retailers such as the Shibakawas were sensitive to this emotional state, and they were keen to foster it as much as possible. Part of the way they did this was to try and break down barriers between themselves and their clients. When he takes part in KdJ events, Shibakawa-san tends to keep a low profile even though technically he is the leader of Aichi KdJ. He lets Kyoko and Takashi Onoda handle almost all the organising. 'I don't want people to think that I am trying to get them to buy anything. When I come to the events, I just want to be like everyone else: someone who loves kimono and loves wearing them. I'm just like them.' Kyoko and Takashi occupy somewhat ambiguous positions, at once customers but part of the industry through their involvement with Azumaya. Kyoko more so because of her part-time job, but Takashi is also known to almost all the members of the extended network for his unique style and sense of authority, but also his photography work and his almost tireless willingness to ferry anyone needing a lift from one destination to another. Shibakawa-san might be the official face of Azumaya, but the Onodas also wield considerable authority. This is partly because they always dress to impress: Takashi's kimono wardrobe clearly demonstrates his penchant for animal prints, and bright colours like yellow and green, preferences that he cannot usually express with Western clothes. Kyoko, by contrast, prefers subtle shades of pale cream, dark green or purple. Overleaf is a photo of Kyoko, Takashi and myself at Azumaya.

The kimono fashion network is characterised by this blurring of roles and the presence of knowledge brokers and facilitators like Kyoko and Takashi, who operate as figures of authority between the retail side and the customer side. Authority is fairly diffuse and relies a great deal on social ties, personality and charisma. In this way, women can hold a lot of authority in this network, surprisingly so in a society which continues to be male-oriented and patriarchal in nature. Kyoko and Ima-san are good examples of the kind of authority that can be wielded through personality and charisma. They are also recognized as arbiters of good taste and seen as models to be imitated. Rob Shields, drawing on Hetherington and Weber, describes consumption lifestyles as 'sites of synergy': 'aesthetic, ethical and expressive styles welded into passionate group identification centred around charisma: magnetic leaders, compelling, charismatic aesthetics and fervent belief' (Shields 1992: 14). Some members tend to exhibit quite strong fan-like behaviour around central figures in the network. Ima-san is the clearest example of this, but Shibakawa-san too attracts fan-like behaviour, particularly because of his weekly internet broadcast. Customers get a lot of

satisfaction from proximity to the ‘leaders’ and the sense that they are also a part of a wave of change.



The kimono fashion network, then, is a community of practice and the ‘joint enterprise’ is a lifestyle that involves wearing the kimono. The ‘shared repertoire’ involves both the practical techniques involved in wearing a kimono but also the sense of taste and aesthetics pursued by its members, which serves as a building block in their sense of self but also cements their belonging to the group. The kimono fashion network is an excellent example of the shape that a search for community and identity, based on consumption and lifestyle, can take in a modern society. In the next section I will explore in greater depth another aspect of the ‘shared repertoire’: the emphasis on knowledge and authenticity.

3. Knowing the authentic

The last key feature of the kimono fashion network is their appetite for knowledge about the kimono and their search for ‘authentic’ kimono and techniques. This was most striking during the Fan Meeting in Yonezawa. The group crowded round Jacquard and Dobby looms and tubs of *benibana* and indigo dye alike with almost reverent interest, drinking in the knowledge being imparted to them by local craftsmen.

Authenticity as a concept is, of course, highly contested in anthropological literature. In the context of Japan, authenticity is frequently framed within the context of cultural nationalism and nostalgia for a past Japan that is deemed to be more ‘authentic’ than modern-day, Westernised Japan. A major influence on this type of analysis is Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger’s famous book *The Invention of Tradition*, in which the authors sought to expose how seemingly ancient, unchanged traditions are ‘invented’ by exploring their historical context and highlighting the extent to which these traditions have been ‘artificially’ created often as a stabilising response to social change and upheaval (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983(2012): 1). In *Mirror of Modernity: Invented Traditions of Modern Japan*, edited by Stephen Vlastos, Japan’s seemingly ancient traditions are ‘exposed’ as modern creations (Vlastos 1998). In this volume, Lee A. Thompson argues that sumo wrestling, particularly the rank of *yokozuna* and the lore associated with the title, are late 18th century products of Yoshida Zenzaemon, who ‘created a great deal of spurious history going back to the ninth century’ and that ‘much of this pseudo-history is still widely accepted’ (Thompson in Vlastos 1998: 176). Marshall Sahlins, in his famous attack on the concept of invented traditions, took exception to this view of sumo wrestling, stating that focusing on customs as ‘invented’ constructs detracts from their ‘meaning’ and ‘particularity’: ‘One may as truly speak of the inventiveness of tradition. Modern sumo is clearly a permutation of older forms and relationships, made appropriate to novel situations’ (Sahlins 1999: 408-9). Sahlins further argues that traditions, in order to survive, must adapt, change with the times and that exclusive focus on historical origin and what goals it serves in the present day by those who created it (money-making, nationhood, social status, etc.) undermines a thorough understanding of the custom’s meaning. Other anthropologists such as William Kelly (1986), Marilyn Ivy (1995) and Jennifer Robertson (1997) have analysed how nostalgia for a ‘lost’ Japan situated in the past has been commodified and made available for sale:

[...] there is a widespread recognition in Japan that the destabilization of capitalist modernity has decreed the loss of much of the past, a past sometimes troped as “traditional”; at the same time, there is a disavowal of this recognition through massive investment in representative survivals refigured as elegiac resources. Through tourism, folklore studies, education, and mass media – and through everyday moments of national-cultural interpellation and identification – Japanese of all generations seek a recognition of continuity that is coterminous with its negation.

Ivy 1995: 10

Nostalgia, then, is entangled with a national identity that is validated by an ‘authentic’ and ‘lost’ past. I take a broader view of the phenomena that I witness in Japan: when hard-core members of the kimono fashion network, the most loyal of customers, spend money to visit Yonezawa and get as close as they can to the techniques that go into making kimono, they are not engaging in a national-identity building exercise. Rather, I argue, they are involved in a consumption ritual and a discourse that characterises not just Japan but all industrialised consumer societies in the 21st century. Lindholm has argued that modern societies are characterized by a ‘thirst for the genuine’ (Lindholm 2008: 2). This ties in with the hypothesis that as societies modernize and traditional place-based communities break up, anxiety is generated and individuals search for alternative communities that are characterized by something real, rooted and genuine. In other words, something ‘authentic’ (Erickson 1995). This is why in modern consumer societies there is an uncomfortable relationship with faceless, alienated consumption in the Marxist sense. Nowadays, goods ranging from coffee to clothing are considered morally superior if they are ‘artisanal’, ‘handmade’, ‘local’ or ‘organic’. Consumption is always implicated in identity-building (Miller 1995) and consumers are intensely preoccupied with the origins of the products they consume because these origins directly impact sense of self and group and/or class identity. In the case of the kimono fashion network, core members derive a very powerful sense of self and belonging from being involved in the community, and kimono and the techniques exert an almost magical power over the members, in much the same way that Harley-Davidson motorbikes do over their riders. Knowing these objects, inside and out, is key to building and maintaining a subculture of consumption. Members of the kimono fashion network are not happy simply being told by retailers that their wares are authentic: many, if not most, of the members have a strong curiosity about the wares and want to see the techniques for themselves. Many also want to try them out for

themselves, and some will also go on to make their own kimono or obi. Making it your own and absorbing the knowledge reveals intense commitment to the community, and not all members display the same level of intense involvement.

As enthusiasm for the lifestyle grows, members are keen to explore all aspects of the kimono and this brings about a thirst for knowing, but also knowing the authentic: kimono that the community considers genuine. This in turn is mediated by taste: the fashion network does not reject silk, but they tend to focus more on kimono that are made out of cotton, which are cheaper and easier to care for than silk kimono. Retailers also experiment with kimono that are made from a blend of silk and cotton or cotton and hemp. Formal silk kimono, such as those that are dyed using *benibana* dye, are also highly valued, though they belong to a much higher price range, affectionately referred to by many members as *abunai* ('dangerous'). This 'danger' is associated with the material of the kimono itself: understanding how it is made, the effort which has gone into making it and its rarity are 'dangerous' because they can seduce the potential customer and make them buy it. Wanting an expensive kimono is intrinsically tied up with having the right kind of taste, that is, understanding how the fabric is made and what makes it special. Members of the community, retailers and customers alike, will extoll the virtues of a particular fabric, such as its *kotaku-kan* (shine), its softness, warmth or resistance to creasing. It is as though the materiality of the kimono itself, the very process of its fabrication, exerts a hold over those who come in contact with it. Not for nothing then, does Shibakawa-san claim that kimono have 'power'. Finally, of course, kimono are dangerous because they can part you with your hard-earned money. Kimono purchases are then quite different from others, as though the desire elicited in the customer by the fabric itself could be enough to affect their common sense and rationality.

Members of the community prefer *fudangi* – non-formal kimono that include cotton, linen and also silk, particularly pongee kimono rather than highly formal kimono with painting techniques, such as *Yūzen*. They are avid consumers of the know-how that goes into making these types of kimono. Such a search for authentic products is also present in Japanese tourism and, I argue, throughout advanced industrial societies generally. Tourism in Japan is very much focused on regional culture and specialties. Tourism boards heavily market the authentic characteristics of local produce, craft and architecture, tying authenticity with place. Adolf Ehrentraut for example explores how Japanese tourists locate authenticity in feudal period architecture and seek out examples of them to satisfy the thirst for contact with an 'authentic' past (Ehrentraut 1993).

Nostalgia plays a part in this search for authenticity in domestic tourism, as William Kelly and Jennifer Robertson have explored (Kelly 1986 and Robertson 1988). The principle is similar with Japanese crafts, including kimono making techniques, which are usually tied to specific regions. When the Fan Meeting took place in Yonezawa, the members of the kimono fashion network were keenly aware of the techniques being in their ‘correct’ place, and therefore being authentic. By bringing the customers to the sites where kimono and obi are made, but also the site of Ima-san’s birth, Azumaya and the other shop owners are giving their customers a sense of connectedness with the place from which products originate, and thereby satisfying their customers’ thirst for authenticity. Shibakawa-san is a stand-in between craftspeople and customers, but by taking the customers to the craft workshops, and allowing them to soak up knowledge directly from the craftspeople, Shibakawa-san is cutting to the chase of what is most powerful in the community: the creation of the item that binds them all together. Giddens offered the concept of ‘reskilling’ in the context of consumers reclaiming certain skills and knowledge back from the world of retail, an empowering experience that impacts a person’s ‘narrative of self-identity’ (Giddens 1991: 140-1). The combination of learning (going to the workshops, learning about techniques), fun (going to *enkai* or parties and staying in ryokan – a traditional Japanese inn) and consumption (paying for the trip and possibly purchasing a kimono) are highlights of the fashion kimono lifestyle. Further, members of the kimono fashion network feel a sense of opposition to regular, mainstream kimono shops that they believe neither care sufficiently about their kimono or their customers, nor have sufficient passion or enthusiasm. This ties in with the community’s morality, in that they see themselves as restoring a sense of authenticity with the objects, traditions and techniques. This bears a similarity to the process of branding goods. As Foster argues, branding works by generating a ‘relationship of trust with consumers, of empathy, of positive emotional response bordering on passion’ (Foster 2008: 16). It is not surprising then, that the concepts of passion and love are mainstays of the kimono fashion network, and the words *suki* or *daisuki* (‘love/like’ and ‘really love/like’) are frequently used by its members. It is not surprising either that Shibakawa-san and Ueda-san, among others, speak of the necessity of ‘branding’ kimono. Branding not only encourages consumers to make strong emotional attachments and invest deeply in commodities (*ibid* 2008: 14), it also encourages widespread recognition and understanding of what the object is. Kimono are distinguished by the techniques that go into making them, which in turn are associated with places, such as Amami Oshima (see Chapter 3) or Ise stencil-dye. Ueda-san in

particular believed that recognition of different types of kimono by region is difficult for most Japanese people to achieve since this knowledge is quite niche, and he believed that branding kimono is a much wiser option – something that he himself is endeavouring to do with Oshima pongee.

It would be tempting, perhaps, to make the argument that since kimono gave way to Western clothes after the war kimono have become exotic and other to Japanese people, contributing to a process of self-exoticization (Tobin 1992: 27-28). If we follow this argument, then, the reason that members of the kimono fashion network turn to the kimono as a lifestyle is because they are drawn to its ‘otherness’. I think it is fair to say that to the vast majority of Japanese people, the kimono and its many accessories are, indeed, ‘other’, as is the kimono canon and the way that the kimono feels on the body. However, many members of the network relate to the kimono as they do to other consumer item-based lifestyles, such as cars or hobbies. They throw themselves into the customization of their outfits, and the kimono lends itself particularly well to this customization: as Jenny Hall notes, fashion trends for the kimono do affect its structure, but were more closely linked with how the kimono was worn (how much the neckline overlapped, how tightly or loosely the robe was wrapped around the body, or what other components were matched with it) (Hall 2017: 6). Members of the network take particular pleasure in combining kimono with elements from their regular wardrobe: scarves instead of *obi-age*, store-bought fabrics used for *haneri* (underkimono collars), hats and frequently with men, shoes and shirts. Members in fact rarely make much mention of the kimono as intrinsically Japanese. Occasionally someone might mention that as a Japanese person it was nice to wear Japanese clothes, but typically their discourses would focus on wanting to be *oshare* (stylish) and express their *konomi* (preferences or tastes) through the kimono. Their discourses suggest that their kimono lifestyle had a lot in common with other types of modern consumption-based lifestyles based around objects, such as cars, rather than being a self-exoticizing project of re-discovering their Japaneseness. In conclusion, the example of the kimono fashion network’s ‘thirst for the genuine’ tells us more about the consumption mores not just of Japan but of industrialised nations in general, than it does about the network’s attempts at building national identity, as models of analysis based on cultural nationalism would have us believe.

Additionally, the example of Shibakawa-san has interesting implications for traditional understandings of self and identity in Japanese society. Understandings of selfhood in Japan have typically focused on models of Japanese society as ‘groupist’, that is to say, group-orientated, as opposed to individualistic. The self, in this view, is ‘relational’ in the sense that it is defined by the group rather than the individual (Kelly 1991: 401, Kuwayama in Rosenberger 1992: 121, Ames, Dissanayake and Kasulis 1994: 108). This idea of the Japanese self as predominantly relational and determined by the group has its roots in the sociology of Chie Nakane, whose influential book was concerned with mechanisms and structures by which Japanese society consolidated group cohesion (Rosenberger 1992: 7). This in turn placed Japan and Western societies (which often implicitly means the United States of America), on a spectrum with extreme groupism (Japan) and extreme individualism (the West) on either end of the spectrum. While the kimono fashion network is a group and the members derive a part of their sense of self from belonging to that group, we can argue that this type of group identification and belonging, based on a consumption item and a community of practice, is very common throughout the world, as I have sought to demonstrate by drawing parallels with biker communities and the alternative music scene. Further, the sometimes very strong sense of individuality exhibited by members of the kimono fashion network, as expressed through clothing choices and arrangement with the kimono, quite strongly contradicts established theories on the Japanese self as purely relational. One could argue that this expression of individuality is codified by the aesthetics and taste of the group, which of course they are, but this brings us back to my previous argument that groups similar in nature to the kimono fashion network exist throughout the world, and therefore relational self and individual choice and expression are not as antithetical to each other as classic literature on selfhood in Japan would suggest.

In this chapter, I have drawn on Etienne Wenger’s concept of ‘community of practice’ to demonstrate how the extended kimono fashion network, comprised of retailers, shop owners, craftspeople, customers and writers like Ima-san, form a community whose ‘joint enterprise’ is the kimono lifestyle. Their practice revolves around consumption, taste and knowledge, and also has an emotional component in that they are strongly committed to their lifestyle. It also has a moral dimension, since they feel that they want ‘authentic’ kimono that are ‘*oshare*’ and therefore stand in opposition to mainstream kimono industry which they perceive to be lacking in passion for their

products. In the next chapter, which will be the concluding chapter to my thesis, I will investigate what the future holds for the kimono in contemporary Japanese society based on my fieldwork and analyses in the preceding chapters of my thesis.

Chapter 6: Conclusion



The aim of this thesis has been, firstly, to shed new light on the Japanese kimono and to address a gap in the literature on this topic. As I have discussed throughout this thesis, there is a surprising lack of academic literature available in English, and even in Japanese, on the topic of the kimono. I have highlighted this strange absence by showing that, even though the kimono is a highly visible and influential element of Japanese culture, it is rarely studied in an academic fashion. The works that exist in English so far have tended to be either technical, in that they delve into the processes by which kimono textiles are made and their regional variations, or historical, in that they seek to give an overview of the way the kimono has evolved and changed throughout the centuries (see Milhaupt 2014). Some are closer to anthropological analysis, such as Liza Dalby's *Fashioning Culture*, but her analysis rarely moves beyond the kimono as a vehicle for nationhood and gender. I have sought to address a major gap in the literature by investigating and

analysing the kimono in the context of the industry that makes and sells it. When we understand that the kimono is an element of material culture inextricably connected to the industry that makes it and embedded in the economic processes that govern its sales, then we can begin to analyse the subtle interconnections between cultural, economic and material life in Japan.

Next, I have sought to contribute to the anthropology of Japan as a sub-discipline by suggesting that reducing studies of traditional culture in Japan to analyses based solely on cultural nationalism means that we stand to miss crucial insights into the interpenetration of economic life and traditional culture in Japan. Further, my thesis shows that the subculture of the kimono fashion network and its discourse on fashion has many parallels with consumption lifestyles across the globe. Limiting a study on the kimono to interpretations based on cultural nationalism and Japanese identity-building is to see the kimono as a specifically Japanese vehicle for creating and maintaining a sense of Japanese identity. This can blind us to the way Japanese consumers are involved in global consumer trends and discourses and strips the kimono of its significance as an economic item of material culture.

1. New knowledge on the kimono industry and contemporary kimono culture

A key aim of this thesis has been to resolve the paradox of a kimono culture posed at the beginning of this work: how can Japan feature both a kimono culture based on the formal, ceremonial kimono that is stagnating (see Chapter 2) and a kimono culture based on fashion and consumption that appears to be becoming popular (see Chapters 4 and 5)? I have shown how there is little overlap or interaction between these two forms of kimono culture. This gap and lack of communication points to a deep generational and ideational schism about what the kimono means in Japanese society and what its role ought to be. It further reveals a society in transition between the older generations' emphasis on the adherence to key ritual moments of the Japanese calendar based on relational identity and a strong loyalty to family, and the younger generations' limited interest in ritual, stronger sense of individual identity, and preference for more globalised forms of lifestyle identity.

I demonstrated how these two cultures exist apparently with little overlap due, in major part, to socio-economic factors such as changing norms in family life and the individualisation of Japanese society. This has brought about the end of customs such as lavish collections of kimono

for a bridal trousseau. This has further split the industry into two camps: those who sell kimono as expensive ceremonial wear (Chapters 2 and 3) and those who have taken the new option to sell it as fashionable wear (Chapters 4 and 5). I analysed how the kimono retail industry has effectively implicated itself in the creation of inalienable wealth in the 20th century Japanese home by marketing and selling the kimono primarily as formal wear. The industry marketed the kimono as an absolute necessity for ceremonial occasions such as weddings, funerals, coming of age ceremonies, graduation and school entrance ceremonies, tea ceremonies, etc. The industry implicated itself deeply in ritual family life by encouraging families to ‘buy’ inalienable wealth for their daughters. This may seem like a contradiction in terms, seen as we commonly view ‘inalienable wealth’ to be the very opposite of a commodity, but my data gives grounds to question the notion that inalienable wealth can a) take place almost exclusively in pre-industrial, small scale societies, and b) apply only to non-commodity items.

The industry was especially apt at integrating threads of traditional culture and adapting them into a new way of consuming kimono. In particular, they were able to encourage the creation of a nationwide custom of putting together lavish bridal trousseau that contained a large number of kimono, in addition to a piece of furniture in which to store them, known as a tansu. These trousseaus could cost up to 10 million yen (approximately £70,000). As I explored in Chapter 2, until the mid-twentieth century this custom was wide-spread only among the upper classes, but post-war wealth made this possible for the whole of Japan’s rising middle class. The industry thus rendered itself central to the process of making inalienable wealth in the Japanese home. It marketed the kimono as an item which effectively became part of the store of a woman’s inalienable wealth, to be passed on to future generations of daughters. The industry directly targeted married women who are, in the context of the Japanese family, tasked with the guardianship of the ritual and ceremonial life of the family; everything from caring for children to caring for ancestors. As a result, these women were particularly receptive to pressure to have the correct equipment for their ritual lives and correctly represent themselves and their family. Generating ever more types of kimono, each of which was deemed essential for a different occasion or which represented a new form of cultural capital meant that women were pressured to buy ever more types of kimono. The industry capitalised on Japan’s flourishing economy in the 1970s, and the culture of excess that governed spending and consumer life in Japanese society at the time.

I have shed new light on how the kimono retail industry itself evolved over the course of the 20th century to focus on selling formal kimono, in line with the increasing Westernisation of Japanese society and the relegation of the kimono to ritual, ceremonial occasions. The structure of the industry is opaque and well-hidden from the public, with a chain of distribution comprised of craftspeople, ‘makers’ (suppliers), *tonya* (wholesalers) and shops. Originally, this network was based on the chain of distribution going back to the Edo period (1600-1868) and although it underwent structural changes during Japan’s post-war economic boom, the chain of distribution remained largely the same. There was no particular reason to change it, since long chains of production and distribution allow for maximum extraction of value from the item being produced, since at each stage a commission is charged, adding to the final price tag of the item. Today, craftspeople are still tasked with separate stages in making a kimono, whether it be weaving the raw silk into a bolt of white silk, dyeing the bolt of silk, or embroidering it, for instance. Most craftspeople have little or no contact with the customer who purchases the kimono they have had a hand in making. In addition, the kimono industry, along with many other industries in Japan such as the funeral and marriage industry, commercialised the ritual knowledge that had previously been transmitted within the home. The knowledge of how to sew, choose and wear a kimono has transitioned out of the hands of family members (usually women, who are typically the guardians of ritual moments and ceremonial life in Japan) and into the hands of companies and businesses, who have commercialised this knowledge and made it a foundation of their business model. This placed the kimono industry in a position of superiority vis-à-vis their clients, thus making customers dependent on the industry to advise them as to the ‘right’ kimono to buy. Having a monopoly on knowledge about the kimono was crucial to this profit-making process, since customers have relatively little knowledge about how and where the kimono was made, and they have little choice but to trust the word of the shop owners. Thus, high prices could be ‘disguised’ as representing the quality of the wares, when in many cases the higher prices simply reflected the premium taken by wholesalers and makers. Further, kimono prices are not fixed, and are set at the discretion of shop owners based on their agreements with wholesalers. As a result, the same bolt of kimono fabric can be priced very differently in different shops.

This process of monopolizing knowledge is mirrored in many other traditional industries in Japan such as the funeral and marriage industries, which have effectively followed this business model of packaging and commercialising ritual practices that used to be handled by family

members in the early 20th century. However, this phenomenon is not just limited to traditional industries in Japan but can be found in vastly different arenas as well. I also explored how the mechanism of generating and exploiting the opaque nature of a business enables the production of expert knowledge and authority upon which customers are forced to rely. Parallels with the strategies of the kimono industry can be found in sectors as different as the financial sector with specialist market analysts using the complexity of financial markets to their advantage in order to market their expertise to financial institutions.

Finally, I analysed the causes behind the kimono retail industry's decline. I highlighted how a business model based on formal kimono and bridal trousseau proved to be extremely fragile, and that the economic recession of the 1990s had hit the industry very hard, effectively placing it in survival mode. The industry, in the end, made a mistake by assuming that social norms surrounding the importance of the kimono for ritual occasions and ceremonies would not be subject to change when, in fact, norms surrounding marriage and the family in particular have evolved and changed dramatically in the last decade of the 20th century and in the first two decades of the 21st. The industry also suffered greatly from the economic crisis of the 1990s and the economic stagnation that followed, causing many wholesalers and shops to close. This also affected spending practices, with many households focusing their incomes on key expenses such as food, rent and mortgages, as well as their children's education. Bridal trousseaus are no longer considered necessary before a wedding, and kimono are no longer the preferred dress code in which to attend a wedding. As a result, shops struggle to sell kimono that are essentially marketed to a shrinking demographic: women in their 50s and older, who still consider these kimono to be necessary. However, these women have many of their own kimono already and as their daughters do not tend to want to own large quantities of kimono, they are a far smaller market and far less dependable than in the 1970s and 1980s.

2. Theoretical contributions to economic anthropology

In this thesis, I have argued for a greater consideration of economic aspects in the anthropology of clothing, which has so far largely focused on the cultural aspects of clothing, more specifically on identity or group belonging (see Eicher and Roach-Higgins 1995, Woodward 2007

and Hansen and Madison 2013 for examples). I have sought to expand anthropological theories of taste with regards to clothing by highlighting that taste is not simply a means of socio-economic differentiation in the manner established by Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1979). Rather, wearing the kimono is an embodied practice that people choose to be encultured into and consists of a whole series of physical techniques, in the Maussian sense, that people have to learn in order to be able to fully master the kimono and its associated tastes and aesthetics. I say choose to be encultured, since the fashion kimono in particular is framed by lifestyle choice and communities of practice based on taste, and therefore wearers of the kimono fashion in particular have elected to become encultured. This stands in opposition to Bourdieu's habitus, which is the set of bodily dispositions that people acquire largely unconsciously.

I have sought to highlight the creative and generative force of economic activity and its ability to bring about not just cultural shifts but new cultural forms as well. I analysed how the kimono industry in the 20th century shaped the kimono canon which many Japanese people still take to be pre-20th century knowledge. In particular, I have stressed that the industry has had a very important role in determining what a kimono is, how it is used and what the norms of wear are. The industry has had a fundamental role in generating the formal kimono that has dominated the landscape of *wafuku*, or Japanese clothing, in 20th century Japan. Cultural norms of wear are not generated in a vacuum, separate from the industries that make clothing, and the industry has had a very strong hand in generating the norms of what I call the 'kimono canon'. These rules governed every aspect of the kimono, something frequently condensed down to TPO: Time, Place and Occasion. These norms dictate, for instance, which type of kimono can be worn to what event, and which colours are age-appropriate.

The industry that makes the kimono is, then, a hugely important factor in the creation of kimono culture and its associated tastes and aesthetics, and one which has been largely overlooked, or not explored in great depth, in academic literature so far. The role of the industry in shaping kimono culture is as key for the ceremonial kimono and the kimono canon as it is for the much more recent 'kimono fashion network' which has been aiming to reshape understandings of the kimono in the last five years, shifting the use of the kimono away from ceremonial occasions and towards the use of the kimono as a fashion item in lifestyle consumption. The second half of this thesis explored the shop Azumaya and the discourse employed by Azumaya's owner, Yoshihide Shibakawa and the other members of the kimono fashion network. A key aspect of the way

Shibakawa-san, and the kimono fashion network as a whole, distinguish themselves from the ‘traditionalists’ in the industry who market the kimono as ceremonial wear, is their discourse on fashion, self-expression and their oppositional discourse towards the rest of the industry. Shibakawa-san, for instance, is sharply critical of the kimono industry’s marketing strategies, such as their coercive sales techniques, their nebulous pricing systems and their lack of enthusiasm or passion for their wares. Shibakawa-san sees himself as an alternative to an industry geared towards selling expensive formal wear. In doing so, he is not just rejecting the ‘old guard’ of the industry, but he is also rejecting a former version of himself, who was implicated in the system and also used to sell very expensive kimono with little interest in the garments themselves, so long as he could make a profit. This is something that he himself readily admits, and he will happily tell anyone willing to listen about his journey of self-discovery through wearing the kimono and learning to appreciate it properly. Shibakawa-san and the fashion network, although comprising only a small part of the industry as a whole, have acquired a large number of followers through their savvy use of social media, their charisma and people skills, as well as their ability to put on events and enlist allies such as Ima Kikuchi who share their values. I have also demonstrated how the birth of the kimono fashion movement shows that the categories of ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ clothing are more ambiguous than they might appear. The discourse employed by the kimono fashion network combines a sense of aesthetics that is specific to the material qualities of the kimono (such as the qualities derived from the techniques and fabric employed, as well as the stitching style) with a discourse on fashion and lifestyle that has many shared characteristics with a global discourse on fashion, lifestyle and individual self-expression through consumption.

This thesis demonstrates then, that both in the case of the kimono canon in the 20th century and the new discourse about the kimono as fashion in the 21st century, the kimono industry itself is a key factor in the generation of new culture.

3. Theoretical contributions to the anthropology of Japan

Studies of Japanese society, and particularly studies focused on the role of traditional culture in Japanese society, have been strongly underpinned by a particular angle of analysis. This angle has been to uncover the ways in which Japanese people, through traditional culture such as the tea ceremony, engage in nationhood-building and cultural nationalism (see Surak 2013, for

example). This mode of analysis is a legacy of the 1980s and 1990s in which critiquing the popular Japanese literature of *Nihonjinron* (see Chapter 1) was a fashionable trend. I do not argue that cultural nationalism is not a feature of Japanese life and society, but I have used this thesis to demonstrate that alternative modes of analysis yield fruitful insights when it comes to traditional culture in Japanese society. Once again, economic anthropology is of great help in moving away from these analyses as it enables us to ground cultural concepts in the economic processes that generate them, and not least, the economic motivations of those people who generate the material culture that forms the basis of traditional culture in Japan. Classic understandings of the kimono have focused on the kimono's ability to encapsulate a sense of Japanese femininity which reinforces gender roles and a powerful sense of Japanese nationhood (see Dalby 2001 and Goldstein-Gidoni 1999).

Although the kimono can be used to reinforce notions about Japanese femininity and nationhood, it is far from the only role the kimono has. As I argued in Chapter 3, in order to sell the kimono in the 1960s and after, the industry marketed the kimono as essential to ritual life, and this in turn implicated the kimono in the creation of inalienable wealth in the home (see also Chapter 2). My exploration of the kimono fashion network demonstrates that analytical frameworks based on cultural nationalism tend to blinker us to the ways in which Japan is part of global consumer trends and discourses, even when it comes to 'traditional' Japanese culture. In Chapters 4 and 5 I have sought to demonstrate that the community of practice based on wearing the kimono as a fashion choice and a lifestyle, and its codes of taste and belonging, have far more to do with globalised processes of community-building to be found not just in Japanese society but in other industrialised nations as well. Shibakawa-san's success, though in part due to his effort and charisma, is also symptomatic of a growing disenchantment with the processes of consumption associated with capitalism and the rising trend of many of the world's consumers to seek out consumption pathways that are in some way meaningful to them. Customers in large-scale, developed societies are exhibiting ever-increasing signs of diversified consumer behaviour, increasingly showing preferences for consumption that champions a cause (such as fair trade) or consumption that promises a stronger, more sustained link with producers and a nostalgia for handmade products, hence the positive association. I have shown how the kimono fashion network is influenced by, and benefits from, the rising popularity of alternatives to mass-produced consumer culture across large-scale consumer societies.

In this way, the remarkable feat of Shibakawa-san and the kimono fashion network has been to take the isolated kimono industry of the post-war period, which was considered to be very separate from Western clothing and the corresponding discourse on modern fashion and align the kimono with a global discourse of fashion, taste and community, as well as an alternative to buying mass-produced clothing. This thesis shows that instead of being simply a case study of a traditional Japanese industry with implications only for the study of Japan, the kimono fashion network reveals a wider, global trend of consumption practices of which Japan is a part. I showed that useful parallels can be drawn between the consumption lifestyle promoted by the kimono fashion network and what John Schouten and James McAlexander call ‘subcultures of consumption’, that is to say, social groups in which members derive a sense of belonging and identity through attachment to an item of consumption. The fashion network then, while a Japanese phenomenon, has much in common with other subcultures of consumption and lifestyle choices across the world, and is a testimony to how powerfully Japanese customers are drawn to modern modes of consumption as a means of shaping personal and group identity. By complementing modes of analysis based on cultural nationalism, which often focus on the way traditional culture is used to mobilise narratives of Japanese cultural uniqueness, I have shown that consumption rituals and discourses on taste, particularly within the kimono fashion network, bear many similarities with consumption and taste throughout the world.

4. Future directions

In September 2018 I will commence a fixed term Lectureship in the Anthropology of Japan at the University of Oxford Brookes. In addition to taking this next step in what I hope will be a career in academia, I will undertake the project of re-writing my thesis into a manuscript aimed at academic publishing, and to publish articles based on my thesis in order to build a publications record. For future research, I will build on my doctoral research and investigate other areas in connection to Japan’s kimono retail industry. I aim to investigate the second-hand kimono industry which has grown since the late 1990s, and how online retail services are aiding or impeding the growth of the kimono industry as a whole. I also aim to investigate how these practices are causing the way the kimono is viewed and used in Japan to evolve. In time, I hope to expand my research

into Japan's traditional industries more generally, and conduct research on the production and retail of other traditional products such as lacquerware, pottery and textiles.

Epilogue: Fit for the future?



The event has been months in preparation and now, finally, it is about to take place. It is late September and the humidity left over from the summer is still heavy in the air. From all over Japan, retailers, craftspeople, independent artists and kitsuke professionals are heading towards Tokyo's elegant Nihonbashi district for the first half of the Kimono Salone event. This event ran in two parts: the first, in late September 2016, is a booth-type sales event with shows and talks taking place on a stage near the booths. There are *shamisen* (three-stringed instrument) recitals and, of course, a talk given by the writer Ima Kikuchi, whose popularity with the kimono fashion network made her talk the most well-attended feature in the event schedule. The second half took place in late October.

The Kimono Salone is a first for everyone. They are all acquainted with the Kimono Carnival, the brain child of Yoshihide Shibakawa and Osamu Kosugi, owners of kimono shops Azumaya and Kimono Kosugi, which has run since 2012. The Kimono Carnival will take place for the sixth time in 2018. From its humble beginnings in 2012 with approximately 200 visitors to the venue, the latest Carnival in 2015 welcomed 900 visitors⁴⁹. The Kimono Carnival is an event

⁴⁹ <https://sites.google.com/site/kimonocarnival/past> (retrieved 10/04/2018).

where dozens of retailers, from well-established kimono shops to independent artists, set up a booth and visitors come in to examine their wares. This type of event is popular in Japan, where big craft fairs are quite common, such as the enormous ‘Hand Craft Fair’ that takes place in Nagoya every June⁵⁰. The Carnival, quite cunningly, always includes a non-kimono aspect that is still nonetheless related to traditional Japanese culture in some way, such as the 2015 Carnival which also featured *nihonshu* (Japanese alcohol) makers and sellers. This means that there is an added draw and gives visitors things to taste and different things to do. The Carnival, having been designed by Shibakawa-san, features almost exclusively his *nakama* (allies) from the kimono fashion network. Becoming a member is quite easy, however. So long as the prospective member wishing to display a booth at the event believes that the kimono and its accessories can be enjoyed as fashion, thus sharing the same philosophy as the fashion network, then they are usually accepted, regardless of whether they are a fourth generation craftsman or a recently graduated art student with no background in the industry. Shibakawa-san, as described in Chapter 4, takes great pains to generate a relaxed and fun atmosphere in direct opposition to the kinds of stiff kimono sales events that the ‘old guard’ of the industry favoured. I had been to a couple of these types of events myself, such as the event organised by the kimono shop Kyorei, described in Chapter 3: these tend to only include old established shops that sell very expensive formal kimono, and they have a reputation for trying to get kimono purchased by any means necessary. In contrast, the Carnival has a lot of booths that sell accessories only, and all the booth holders are explicitly instructed not to be pushy or aggressive. Even the word ‘selling’ (*uru*) is something of a dirty word, and the event is framed as being first and foremost to be more about fun and enjoyment of the kimono than sales, even though, of course, the idea is to produce enough profit so that the event does not generate *akaji* (going into the red).

The Kimono Salone is an event on a much bigger, more formal scale than the Carnival. In 2016, the steering committee of a different kimono sales event named Kimono Salone in Tokyo approached Shibakawa-san to see if he would be willing to take over the running of the Kimono Salone. The committee had witnessed the growing success of Shibakawa-san and Kosugi-san’s Carnival event over the previous few years. This contrasted sharply with their own event, the Salone, which was relatively poorly attended and the revenue generated from the sales never met the cost of setting up the event, putting the overall balance for the event in the red. After some

⁵⁰ <http://handcraft.sakura.ne.jp/report.html> (retrieved 05/04/2018).

thought, Shibakawa-san accepted. It was a complicated affair to organise. Firstly, it meant collapsing the Carnival and Salone into a single event, since many customers had become accustomed to having the Carnival to go to and would have resented losing their event. This meant that throughout the planning and during the event itself, there was some confusion about the event's name, with some calling it the Salone and others the Carnival. The names themselves, both foreign loanwords, evoked very different atmospheres. The Salone, from Italian, was aiming for cool sophistication, whereas the Carnival evoked the party atmosphere of the carnival festivities. The uncomfortable dual-naming remained, clearly demonstrating that the Carnival mapped somewhat awkwardly onto the Salone template of expensive formal wear.

The beginning of the event itself was a markedly formal affair. There was an opening event in which the steering committee and their advisors, which included many key figures in the fashion network, came on stage. Their separation was visible in terms of demeanour, but also of age and dress: the fashion network members are sticklers for wearing the kimono, some such as Shibakawa-san wearing it every day. By contrast, the steering committee were mostly not wearing kimono. The old steering committee had not quite accepted the new blood – in this case Shibakawa-san, designer Jotaro Saito and Koichi Fujii (see Chapter 5) – and the members of the fashion network were introduced to the listening crowd, which gave a slightly strange effect since the crowd for the most part knew Shibakawa-san and the others much better than the audience knew the members of the committee. Although Shibakawa-san is in his 40s, and the other members are in their 50s, they were introduced as *wakate* (young) by the steering committee, something which Shibakawa-san recalled with a mixture of amusement and bafflement later on. As we watched the opening ceremony unfold, I heard someone remark on how the stiff nature of the ceremony differed from that of the Carnival, in which the same opening ceremony was far more jocular and relaxed.

The event unfolded with a certain amount of trepidation. The effort involved in bringing everyone together from different parts of Japan was enormous. Most participants were not based in Tokyo and had had to ship in their wares from different parts of Japan. In the hours running up to the opening of the event, there was an atmosphere of frenzied activity and carefully controlled anxiety. People were running back and forth setting up booths and others were racing to get dressed in kimono before the start. I was present under the aegis of Azumaya and Shibakawa-san, and I had even been given a press badge, which enabled me to roam freely and question people as I

pleased. In the run up to the opening, however, I helped out with small tasks such as stapling leaflets and fetching drinks for the booth holders, and generally stayed out of the way of people I could not help. Kyoko and Takashi were there too, and while Takashi took photos (often sweeping me up in his wake as he tirelessly visited booth after booth), Kyoko manned the cake stall run by Shibakawa-san's childhood friend. Kyoko would usually direct me towards tasks I could feasibly help with, and occasionally Shibakawa-san would do so too. When she had a moment, Kyoko would accompany me on my rounds and introduce me to people.

Given my affiliations with Azumaya, I made sure to wear a kimono every day. This time, it was a purple cotton kimono made especially for the occasion and bought from Azumaya. It had been perfectly stitched by Azumaya's best seamstress, who had taken my measurements in person. Although this time I also had to wear the same kimono all three days, it was a rather better fitting and classier affair than my previous attempt at the Ima-san Fan Meeting in May (see Chapter 5). It was of course a matter of social obligation to wear a kimono for the event – I could not have dreamt of letting down Shibakawa-san or Kyoko – but by then it was also a matter of personal pride for me.

Relief flooded the venue as visitors and customers appeared, a trickle at first, but soon there were enough to make moving around the venue difficult. The venue itself comprised two floors of a large high-rise building named YUITO in Nihonbashi. Small and large booths had been crammed into every possible space over the two floors. As the three-day event unfolded, I saw Shibakawa-san and the other major figures begin to relax. The event was also an ideal opportunity for me to meet members of the network I had hitherto heard of but not met in person such as Fujii-san and Kosugi-san. The atmosphere at the evening parties was one of jubilation and, as usual, the fashion network members partied hard.

Each participant paid for a booth in order to cover the organisers' cost of renting the venue, but the sum they paid reflected their size and revenue as a shop. Shibakawa-san and the others paid far more substantial sums than small independent outlets such as Berry Kōbō or Chiesu (see Chapter 5). As a result, the risks incurred by the smaller participants were far less than those incurred by the larger outlets, who could afford the risk. In the 2016 Kimono Salone, Shibakawa-san did not quite achieve complete autonomy from the traditionalist side of the industry in the way he had when he generated the Carnival, which was his own event. Despite having dictated the rules of etiquette for the Salone, in particular no forceful or aggressive sales techniques, Shibakawa-san

and his allies on the committee found themselves going head to head with a group of traditional kimono shops and craftspeople in Kyoto. I was never able to access their side of the story, since my information came from the fashion network side of the equation, but it seems that the group insisted on being invited to the Salone, in spite of their ethos being very different from that of the Kimono Carnival and its merry band of misfits and independent retailers and artists. Their argument revolved around the fact that the Kyoto contingent would all bring substantial financial support, with large contributions far outstripping what the independents could bring to the table. Whether it was this argument or a sense of social obligation, or perhaps an uncertainty as to how the event would unfold, Shibakawa-san and the others agreed to allow the Kyoto contingent to come to the Salone. There was, however, a feeling that they had muscled into what was, to all intents and purposes, a fashion network event. They corralled themselves into a room that they partitioned into a display area and a sales area at the Salone and kept largely to themselves. I toured their rooms several times and found them to be rather less visited than other parts of the venue. As is the wont of traditional kimono businesses, they had generated a slightly daunting atmosphere – even the air conditioning had been turned up higher in their room, making the air colder in their part of the venue than anywhere else. Whether they generated much revenue, I could not be sure, but I was certain that they had far fewer visitors than the fashion network neighbours.

Fast-forward to 2017, and the Kimono Salone takes place once more in September and October. This time, Shibakawa-san has the confidence that comes from experience. He is now officially on the committee, and he has the precedent of keeping figures in the black for the first half of the Salone, if not the second. Confident now that he does not need the Kyoto contingent even as a backup plan, he does not invite them to the Kimono Salone in 2017. Even without their contribution, the figures stay in the black. Shibakawa-san had, in effect, shown that they were no longer needed to steer the ship and that he had, to a much greater degree than before, shaken free of their influence. Roughly 13,500 people came to the events of the Salone 2017, including the booths and talks in September, and the fashion show in October. In 2016, the number of visitors for the event stood at 10,000. With more power to do things as he sees fit, Shibakawa-san has brought back the Carnival as a separate event in 2018, this time taking place in Hakata (Kyushu). It will be the sixth time that the Carnival has taken place.

The key words for the 2018 Salone are English: ‘open mind, fashion and enjoyment’⁵¹. The future, however, is far from certain. Some key members of the fashion network will not attend the Salone in 2018, and some, such as Masugi’s Ueda-san (see Chapter 4) who never attended. More broadly speaking, Shibakawa-san worries that the leaders of the kimono fashion network – himself, Ima-san, Fujii-san and the others – are all in their 40s or 50s, and as yet no one younger than that has stepped up to continue their fight. On the one hand, the Kimono Salone is evidence that the fashion network has the power, charisma and support they need to oust the old guard of the traditional kimono industry that sells primarily expensive formal kimono. On the other, however, people in their 20s and 30s appear happy in their roles as consumers and supporters of the network, rather than leaders. Shibakawa-san’s dearest wish, he has told me multiple times, is for a new generation of leaders to be there to take over the fight when he retires. ‘No one will listen to me when I am old,’ he says, smiling but the look in his eyes tells me that he is only half-joking. ‘Someone young has to take over’. So far, this does not appear to be happening. It seems that, much as Shibakawa-san’s generation was the one which successfully found an alternative solution for the kimono industry and managed to stand up to the often deeply mistrusted older generation of retailers, Shibakawa-san is now facing a generational schism of his own. The reportedly passive and apathetic nature of the younger generations in Japan is a source of much concern in public opinion in Japan, a concern which Shibakawa-san echoes. It is unclear, then, whether the kimono fashion movement has the momentum to keep going once Shibakawa-san and the others lay down their arms. Until likely successors take up the fight, the future of the movement remains uncertain.

⁵¹ <http://kimono-salone.com/2016consept/> (retrieved 09/04/2018).

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