

CULTURE

Changing times influenced the Kimono in Japan. Did you know kimono simply means “thing worn” and was originally a catch-all term for clothing?



Credit: The Puzzlers Damian/Upsplash

The Kimono serves as a cultural shorthand for a symbol of tradition in Japan, but it has a very complex past even though it is simply crafted from one piece of fabric with a single seam. The kimono first appeared in the 8th century. Heian noblewomen wore 12 layers, symbolizing both the seasons and events during the peaceful Heian era of 794 - 1192 AD. It was during that period when the straight-line-cut sewing technique was developed, changing fashion in Japan forever. This new method allowed for versatile garments that were essentially one-size-fits-all and suitable for all climates. The simple kimono slowly became layered. This allowed people to get more creative with color, which prior to that, denoted the time of year or political social class. This led to a veritable explosion of hues during the Kamakura (1192-1338) and Muromachi (1338-1573) periods. Bright colors were all the rage – including on the battlefield. As for the name, what we now call a kimono was known as a *kosode*, which means small sleeves, during the Edo period (1603-1868).

During the Meiji period (1868-1912), Japan started to be influenced by western culture And, rather than appear as a feudal state, it evolved into the Empire of Japan, a genuine great power that rivaled the Ottoman and Russian empires. That change affected the textile industry. It became modernized and used imported synthetic dyes allowing colors like red and purple to be worn by the masses instead of just the elite. But then something happened that was unforeseeable. In 1871, Emperor Meiji proclaimed that Western clothing was to be worn by all government officials, military, police and postal workers. Evidently, he thought this was key in being respected by the European and American powers. However, women were still encouraged to wear kimonos--- further dividing gender equality.



Credit: GC Shutter/istock

A person's kimono can say a lot about them: age, gender and marital status. We live in an age of nostalgia, which is part of why the kimono is as recognizable as a symbol of Japan today as it would have been hundreds of years ago. While you might not find many people wearing them on the streets of Tokyo, they remain a vital thread in Japan's cultural fabric.

Significance of color

White - White is like a double-edged sword in Japanese culture. It is a blessed and sacred color that you see in traditional weddings and the Japanese national flag, but on the other hand, it inherently denotes death and mourning too.





KENDALL JENNER

Interesting factoid: A custom when attending a Japanese wedding is that you do not give an amount of money that starts with an even number. People usually put 5,000 yen, 10,000 yen, or 30,000 yen, which are all odd numbers (the first digit), into the gift money envelope (Shugi-bukuro). Japanese believe that even numbers can be easily "divided", and therefore it is bad luck to imply the meaning of break-up and divorce.

Green - The color of life and growth. In addition, the Japanese word for green is also the word for vegetation. It represents eternity and vitality. You can see how much they love nature by appreciating the green gardens or small plants in almost every Japanese house.

Red-You see red a lot in Japan, especially on the shrine gates and temples. It is believed that red can protect people from evil and disaster. However, do not bring anything red to your Japanese friends as a house-warming gift. It's associated with fire, which might bring bad luck or fire accidents to the new house.



MADONNA

Blue - I don't know if Lady Gaga was thinking of this when she chose this blue kimono to wear to yoga class, but blue represents purity and calmness in Japanese culture, mainly because of the stretch of deep blue water that surrounds the Japanese islands.

Purple - A fun time, people in purple clothes. seen because expensive and It was worn by and kabuki describes an hand, it is also threatening turning purple is



SCARLETT JOHANSSON

fact about purple– for a long Japan were forbidden to wear The color purple used to be rarely its raw material, *shugasa*, was the cloth was difficult to make. high officials, the Imperial Family actors. On the one hand, it elegant image, but on the other symptomatic of some life-problems. For example, your lips a sign that you are sick.



LADY GAGA

Fashion has a powerful way of reflecting a culture and history. Exploring the kimono provides a window into the history of Japan.

For many Japanese people, wearing a kimono is a way of maintaining connections with their Japanese identity when so many aspects of lifestyle in Japan have become westernized.

Today, the older generation continues to wear the kimono, as do those working in traditional restaurants. Mostly, kimonos are saved for special occasions. As a result of this, the kimono's symbolic significance has strengthened.