

IMAGES OF JAPAN SEEN THROUGH THE CHANGING RECEPTION OF JAPANESE FASHION IN FRANCE

Kyoko Koma
Vytautas Magnus University

Keywords: Japanese fashion in France, acculturation, French fashion magazine, images of Japan, exoticism, identity.

Pagrindinės sąvokos: Japonijos mada Prancūzijoje, akultūracija, prancūziškas mados žurnalas, Japonijos įvaizdžiai, egzoticizmas, identitetas.

Introduction

As Kiyokazu Washida said, “Clothes Make People”, it could be said that clothing fashion has a great role in the formation of identity. In the modern and contemporary period, when the self and the world are imagined and diffused under the influence of globalised media development, it seems to us that the ‘identity’ of our period is perceived at the crossing of how I and others look. Based on this idea, in our paper, I will discuss how the ‘identities’ of Japanese women has been constructed through the acceptance of Japanese fashion represented in French Media. Japanese fashion has been present in France since the end of the 19th century. The First wave of Japanese fashion in Paris was the kimono at the end of the 19th/beginning of 20th century. The second wave of the Japanese fashion in Paris began at the beginning of the 1970s when fashion designer Kenzo Takada came to Paris to launch his prêt-à-porter collection – such collections are followed closely by Japanese people within fashion. This influence created a base that prepared for the success of Japanese fashion designers such as Comme des garçons and Yohji Yamamoto in the 1980s. In the 1990s, not only Japanese

professional designers but also Japanese street Fashion, which came from Japan to France as *kawaii* ('cute' in English) fashion and started to influence French fashion.

Fashion, Identity, Others

Identity can be defined using three points, as follows. First, it can be defined as a constructed representation. B Olivier explains:

The identities are representations, images, and not realities. The identity is constructed. The identities are the object of permanent interpretations and reinterpretations... It is the system of representation of the self and the other for individual identities, and of our and others' collective identity (Olivier 2009: 8).

The second point is that the other can be necessary to construct the identity of the self: identity is a "product of the relation to others" (Benichou 2006: 13).

As the third point, I indicate that the other is not a reality but a representation. According to J Berting, "the observation of the other is to be governed by collective representations or stereotypes as soon as the distinction is done: a person is the other because a person has one or several features which distinguish them from us" (Berting 2009: 58). The collective representation of the other formed by stereotypes is used to construct the self-identity. To examine the construction of identity in our paper, I define identity as a representation produced in relation to the representation of the other by stereotypes, where the other has some features distinguishing them from us.

Fashion could be considered as a device constructing this identity. It could be said Japanese clothing fashions adopted in France have a significant role in creating the identity that would become the image of Japan in French eyes.

Our Hypothesis: Two Categorisations of Japanese Fashion Tendencies in France

I could classify the Japanese fashion boom in France into two categories. On the one hand, there is the Japanese 'peculiar' fashion style that was introduced to France not as a specific Japanese designer's

fashion but as the Japanese 'indigenous' style, which has become popular in France without a particular Japanese designer's intention. On the other hand, there are Japanese designer fashions that are presented by Japanese fashion designers who advance into France in order to intentionally promote their fashions. There are two main examples of the former. The first is the kimono, which was the first wave of Japanese fashion in Paris at the end of the nineteenth century and which became a loan word that all French understand. (This style also influenced European designers' fashions.) The second is *kawaii* fashion for the younger generation, considered a key term of the second wave of Japonism. *Kawaii* is Japanese street fashion and has been coming from Japan to France since the end of the twentieth century.

This second wave of Japanese fashion in Paris began at the beginning of the 1970s when fashion designer Kenzo Takada came to Paris to launch his prêt-à-porter collection. Japanese people in the fashion industry aimed to be part of the Parisian prêt-à-porter market (Koma 2012). This influence created a basis for the success of Japanese fashion designers such as Comme des Garçons and Yohji Yamamoto in the 1980s. For Japan - which has continued to imitate and to learn French fashion in order to be Westernised since the opening of the country to foreign influence, and in particular since WWII, and has always considered France an example to follow in the fashion world - the advance of a Japanese designer in the French fashion world was very meaningful. The period of advancement corresponds to the period of Japanese economic growth.

As I have mentioned, an image of Japanese women as the other in France (that is, Japanese women's 'identity' as seen by French others) has been constructed through these fashions. It could be considered a hypothesis that through previous fashion, Japanese women's 'identity' has been constructed as *immature* even a century after the first wave of Japonism in the nineteenth century. The second image, that of women wearing Japanese fashion designers' fashion in the 1970s and 1980s, switched from being a symbol of liberty to a symbol of something incomprehensible or of subjecting one to violence. The first 'immature' image has not changed; the second image, created by Japanese designers in two different decades, has changed according to the French social context.

In our research I found one common root for these images of Japanese women constructed through fashion: exoticism. This is a labelling of exoticism by others: Japanese women and fashion that are very far from 'us'.

I would like to show how the image of Japanese women as immature or subject to violence has been diachronically formed through the Japanese fashion represented in French media.

What is Exotic?

According to *Le Dictionnaire Historique de la Langue Française* (the historic dictionary of the French language), exotic signifies that something comes from distant countries. Its ancient definition is also “not belonging to the civilisations of the Occident (*Le nouveau Petit Robert de la langue française* (the new Petit Robert of the French language)). This term has been used since the beginning of the nineteenth century to designate habits, art, and so on.

Jean-Marc Moura presents his idea of exoticism as follows:

The first originality of exoticism is to realise the identification of the object and the place. The foreign space [...] becomes the object of research. Curious, strange aspects of the foreign are sought and staged by the writer who creates an extraordinary world. Generally, exoticism is considered a reverie that is attached to far space and realised in writing¹ (Moura 1992: 4).

Moura also explains that traditionally, cosmopolitanism, being open to all foreign influences, opposes exoticism, which takes the foreigner as literary subject. According to him, exoticism has been a part of literature since the Middle Ages; however, since the 20th century exoticism has not meant the exoticism of literature...the theme of the other place has become one of the most used by the media and within audio-visual media in general. Thus, the journeys of past centuries are successfully re-edited (Moura 1992: 84).

The readers of literature dealing with exoticism were able to touch indirectly the culture of others through the writer's experience. Readers of media dealing with the exotic fashion *invading* their countries are obliged to touch directly the culture of the other as an element of their own culture. French media have represented Japanese fashion as invading France, using several levels of the exotic in order to legitimate French

¹ The text is translated by the author. Original: “L’originalité première de l’exotisme est de réaliser l’identification de l’objet de la quête et des lieux. L’espace étranger [...] devient l’objet-même de la recherche. Ses aspects curieux, étranges, piquants, sont recherchés et mis en scène par l’écrivain qui crée ainsi un monde extraordinaire. D’une manière générale, on entendra donc par exotisme une rêverie qui s’attache à un espace lointain et se réalise dans une écriture”.

identity. I will see how French media construct the exotic character of Japanese fashion.

Exoticism as the Immaturity of the Japanese Woman as opposed to the French Woman

(1) Immaturity and Kimono style?

As Akiko Fukai showed in her article entitled Japonism in Fashion:

Beginning in 1907, the expressions *Le Japon* and *le kimono* came into general use, particularly among women, while fashion magazines ran photographs of the kimono silhouette, kimono sleeves, overlapping kimono closures, and trailing kimono hems. Expressions such as *manche kimono* (kimono sleeve), 'Japanese form', and '*à la japonaise*' filled their pages, describing either dresses worn in kimono style or Japanese details (Fukai 1996: 23)².

As an example, in *Femina*, a French fashion magazine that began publication in 1903, before the 1907 Japonism fashion boom, I find Japonism in French Fashion, for example, Mme Chrysanthemum's Costume (*Femina*, February 10th 1903) and the Petit Paletot Kimono (*Femina*, August 15th 1903).

In 1868, Pierre Loti published *Madame Chrysanthème*, a successful novel about the author's impressions of Japan in the form of an intimately written diary. Loti evokes, in particular, the image of Japanese women, whom he describes as dolls or *mousmé*, a neologism designating a type of young Japanese daughter. The book details certain prejudices regarding Japanese people that were held by Europeans. Japanese women were regarded as exotic, "a little vapid or sickly" and "submissive" to the desires of men (Pons and Souyri 2002: 69). Reflecting this vogue, Japanese fashion kimonos and Japanese women were presented in some French women's magazines. Here, *Femina* introduced French fashion influenced by the style of the kimono as "*Madam Chrysanthemum style*" inspired by the main character Madam Chrysanthemum, described by Loti as a "*petite mousmé*" in his novel.

² Susan J. Napier also remarked that "the cult of Japan would spread from bohemian artists and intellectuals, who became fascinated by the new vision that the Japanese culture seemed to present, to upper-class women wearing the latest kimono-inspired fashions, to the newly emergent middle class, who would decorate their parlors with Japanese curios and fans (Napier 2007: 24).

In the novel, because of the author's incomprehension of the Japanese language, or because of the deprecating consideration of Japanese women as objects, it was not their sentiments but their appearances, in particular their clothes, that were described (Koma 2010b: 27). Such descriptions can be considered not only an influence on the popularity of Japanese art at the end of the nineteenth century, but also as a device reinforcing the image of Japanese women from Loti's novel as "objects" or "bibelot d'étagère". As an example: "I recognised a dressed up small doll...Her dress is pearl grey in silk, her obi in mauve satin" (Loti 1990: 67). Though the kimono is more positively written about than the Japanese woman wearing it, their bodies are often described in scathing style: "Oh !...what horror when she [a Japanese geisha] returns! She has the horrible, contracted, pale face of a ghost, or of a vampire" (Loti 1990: 63).

The physique of the Japanese woman is sometimes described as ugly, in contrast with the grace of the kimono. It should be considered that without describing the emotions or sentiments of the female characters presented in *Madam Chrysanthemum*, description focuses on the detail of the physical appearance of Japanese women. This reinforces their image as *poupee-objets* ('doll-objects') that are immature and have no emotions, according to the narrator.

Could I not consider these fashions inspired by Kimono style an immature style? And could kimono style also be considered a *kosupure* (imitation)³ of Madam Chrysanthemum's style; that is, was one part of the novel – the kimono – adopted into French fashion in order to imitate this famous character?

(2) Immaturity and the *kawaii* style

Since 1990, Japanese popular culture, such as *manga*, video games, and street fashion, has been imported into France, as into other countries. One of the key words in this movement is *kawaii* (cute). However, as Koga showed, "outside of Japan, *kawaii* designates [rather] the new Japanese culture such as *anime* or *manga*; the fashion *kawaii*, a casual fashion such as *harajuku kei* [Harajuku street fashion]" (Koga 2006: 210). What's more, C. Veillon

³ Napier also interprets Monet's *La Japonaise* as a kind of impudent 'cosplay' of both aesthetic and ideological type as follows: "Monet is having his wife 'try on' a new identity, one that is still essentially European, but one that is imbued with Otherness, from the controversial subject matter and the vivid colors and bold brushstrokes to the emphasis on the kimono rather than model (Napier 2007: 22).

quotes the definition of *kawaii* given by S. Kinsella: “the *kawaii* phenomenon, and the behaviour it implies, is a kind of revolt by young Japanese” who “play the role of children in order to accent their so-called immaturity and incapacity to take social responsibilities” (Veillon 2008 : 63).

The style of *kawaii* adopted in France tends to focus on a kind of immaturity, which does not correspond to *kawaii* style in Japan.

For instances, the term *kawaii* could also include, on the one hand, a style aimed at attracting men, for example in the young women’s magazine *Cancam* which is addressed to students or to young female workers; while on the other hand, a style independent of men and society, such as the Gothic Lolita style published in the teenage journal *Cuties* (Koga 2006: 129-136) or the *Otona kawaii* (literally ‘adult cute’) style illustrating feminine maturity in the journal *Story*, which has a target readership composed principally of around 40-year-olds.

The Japanese women’s journal *Anan* devoted their April 19th 2006 special issue to “a new definition of *kawaii*”, putting on the cover a popular actress Yoshino Kimura and her explication: *kawaii* is “the supreme compliment for all women... In my opinion, women who have inner reserves, which only mature women could have, could express real *kawaii* without hesitation”.

In French national newspapers such as *Le Monde*, *Libération* and *Le Figaro* the term *kawaii* has not been very numerous since its first presentation in 1999. This term appeared for the first time in *Le Monde* in 1999⁴. The term has been used in *Libération* since 2002 and in *Le Figaro* since 2006. It appears 4 times in *Le Monde*, 11 times each in *Libération* and *Le Figaro*. In these newspapers, the term *kawaii* is used to designate the character of Japanese popular culture or the activities of Japanese artist Takashi Murakami as vividly or perversely cute⁵ (Koma 2010a).

What’s more, in *Le Dictionnaire du Look* (the dictionary of the look) published in France in 2009, *kawaii* is used to describe a childish universe: “the *kawaii* world is the world of the child, filled with stars; panda babies and very cute fireflies are used to describe the childish universe” (De Magargerie 2009: 131). I found fashion influenced by *manga* in *Madame Figaro*, although it was always in guise of the Japanese character Hello Kitty.

⁴ Example: “ILS sont une quinzaine toutes les heures à attendre l’apparition d’Aibo [chien robot] (...) Dans la foule, les « kawaii » (qu’il est mignon !) fusent (...)” (*Le Monde*, 9th June 1999).

⁵ Example: “Il mélange le mignon pervers du *kawaii* avec son trait hérissé habituel, les costumes d’un folklore éclectique et l’architecture idem” (*Libération*, 20th August 2004).

The “calm” version of the *kawaii* style could be found in *Glamour* of April 2010, for which the caption is, “KAWAII! The first sun’s ray, the *look preppy* of the Japanese is adopted.” The *kawaii* style, adopted in France, is focused on a kind of immaturity, which does not always correspond to the *kawaii* style of Japan. The tendency to qualify Japanese woman and style in terms evoking immaturity, such as *mignon* (cute) and *petit* (small), already began in the 19th century. In the 19th century novel *Madam Chrysanthemum*, the narrator stated,

“I really abuse the adjective ‘petit’. I know it well, but how could I do otherwise? – In describing the things of this country, I tended to use it 10 times in a line. Little, vapid, cute (in a negative sense), the morals and physiques of Japan are in these three words....” (Loti 1990: 182).

As French writer Michel Butor said, “Loti felt adult in a child’s country” (Butor 1995 : 41). What’s more, as I remarked before, S. Kinsella says that *kawaii* is a way of escaping the restrictions governing Japanese youth. Even now, as Brian Morean indicates regarding the images of Japan presented in British advertisements, Japanese people are often represented as children, effeminate, or incomprehensible (Morean 2006: 77-112).

Thus, how could the Japanese fashion booms in France, such as Kimono style and *kawaii*, not be considered as connected with immaturity?

What’s more, in the electronic version of the French women’s magazine *Elle* published between 2007 and 2011, I found forty-two articles using the term ‘kawai’ instead of *kawaii*. Among these articles, two concerning the fashion are titled: “very kawai Japanese corset in printed cotton”, and “MUST HAVE these cashmere ultra pop are kawai...” In the first article, a corset is presented of which the motif is a geisha; in the second, a sweater inspired by *manga*. Here the term *kawai*, which represents immaturity, is applied to two clothing styles that were part of the Japonism of nineteenth and twentieth centuries: geisha, which first appeared in *Madam Chrysanthemum*, and popular culture.

Could I say that the Japanese fashion adopted by the French at the beginning of, and later in, the twentieth century was based on a stereotype of Japan? Is it possible to say that the contemporary *kawaii* style is a kind of heir of the *mousmé*, described as cute or small, a mark of immaturity, interpreted and transformed in France around the beginning of 20th century? At that time it was a French countess who imitated the cute *mousmé* (Koma 2011: 25-30), although in our period, strongly globalised and with

information widely available, the *kawaii* style is adopted by some young people in France and other countries. Japonism has become democratised in the 21st century⁶. Could I not say that French interest in the kimono, connected with *mousmé* at the beginning of the 20th century and in *kawaii* style at the beginning of 21st century, is based on a persistent Japanese stereotype: immaturity?

What's more, not only Japanese fashion and Japanese women, but also Japanese culture was considered *kawaii*, something that correspond to an explanation in a kind of encyclopaedia of Japanese culture for French teenagers, *kawaii trop mignon, le livre 100 pourcent Japon* (*kawaii too cute, the 100 percent Japanese book*), published by Edition Larousse. In the summary presented on the cover of this book, I found the following text:

Kawaii mania will no longer be a secret to you. This book is for girls fascinated by Japan. This book, 100% Japanese, describes all events associated with these trends from the country of Hello Kitty: the fashion, the culture, the way of living.

For a long time Japan has been called by names such as “The Land of the Rising Sun”, but this encyclopaedia explains not only Japanese youth culture but also traditional Japanese and general daily culture, referring to Japan as “the country of Hello Kitty”. Japanese traditions and general culture are reduced to the culture of the country of Hello Kitty. Such a denomination, and the concept of this book, generalise the idea by which Japan continues to be considered a childish country.

Representations of fashion proposed by Japanese designers in France: Appropriated or assimilated, sublimated into art, fashion's detested exoticism

Since the 1970s, Japanese fashion designers such as Kenzo Takada started to present their creations in the Paris prêt-à-porter collections, which overturn the traditional aesthetic standard of French fashion emphasising femininity and the female body. Such creations have been represented in

⁶ A. Zykas quotes *Agency for Cultural Affairs* published in 2009, “[...]One strategic document even parallelizes it to the Japonaiserie of the 19th century, stating: ‘the situation, when this Japan-origin modern culture attracts worldwide attention, could be called the rebirth of Japonism. However, its influence is not confined within the notion of high culture, but expands towards the other levels of human life, like food culture, design, fashion, popular music...’ (Agency for Cultural Affairs, 2009: 1)” (Zykas 2011).

several ways by French media according to the social context of the period in which they were presented. I will try to examine how Japanese fashion designers such as Kenzo Takada, Issey Miyake and Rei Kawakubo, who present their fashion in Paris, have been represented in the French media of 1970s and 1980s when Japanese designers started presenting their creation in Parisian prêt-à-porter collections.

(1) Kenzo: assimilation or appropriation as a French designer?

Kenzo Takada, Japanese creator born in Japan in 1939, established his prêt-à-porter brand in 1970 in France. In the book *le Dictionnaire de la Mode au XXe siècle* (Dictionary of 20th century Fashion) his brand is not presented as a Japanese but French brand, and Kenzo as the most Parisian Japanese designer. In 1965, when he arrived in France, French fashion magazines such as *Elle* and *Jardin des Modes* bought his designs and he started work at two French fashion companies (Pisenti and Relations Textiles). In 1970, Kenzo opened his small fashion shop Jungle Jap using cheap clothes to make his fashion. No one had used such clothes before in a Parisian prêt-à-porter collection and this allowed him success in the Paris Fashion world in this period. It is said that Kenzo Fashion is an intersection between traditional Japan and modern folkloric Europe.⁷ When he arrived in the French fashion world in 1971, *France Soir* presented Kenzo as a leader of French prêt-à-porter, saying, “Kenzo: it is the liberty” (*France Soir* 24/10/1973). It could be considered that he followed unconsciously or consciously the dominant current ‘anti-establishment’ of the 1970’s in France, in which the French fashion world waited for new blood in this period. He is considered a “Japanese designer the closest French one” as I presented. What’s more, the Ministry of Culture and communication of France presented Kenzo on its website “culture gouv fr” in the fashion section with French designers⁸.

I could say about the fashion proposed by Kenzo Takada in France that

⁷ I refer to the article on Kenzo Takada in *le Dictionnaire de la Mode au XXe siècle* (Dictionary of Fashion in the 20th century).

⁸ http://www.culture.fr/fr/annuaire_sites?b_start:int=0&th=art_contemporain&sssth1=c168 consulted on January 5th 2012. The Fashion designers presented in this site are, 1 Australian, 2 Japanese, 1 British and the others French: Agnes B, Chanel, Elle, Christian Lacroix, Costume National, Dior, Helmut Lang, Issey Miyake, John Galiano, Givency, Jean-Paul Gaultir, Martié, François Girbaud, Nina Ricci, Sonia Rykiel and Thierry Mugley.

to call Kenzo's fashion French, to say that it represents French culture, could be a kind of integration, or a domination of Kenzo's otherness⁹.

(2) Issey Miyake: exoticism sublimated into art and futurism

Issey Miyake, born in Hiroshima in 1936, established his prêt-à-porter brand in 1971, the year in which he showed his first collection in New York and Tokyo. In 1973, his collection moved from New York to Paris, and the French fashion magazine *Elle* devoted its front cover to Miyake's Fashion. In 1975, he opened his first shop in Paris and since the second half of 1980 he has worked a lot with pleats, to which Miyake is considered to bring a contemporary aesthetic expression¹⁰.

Especially since the second half of the 1980s, the fashions proposed by Issey Miyake have often been presented as from the "designer of the third millennium" (*Le Figaro*, October 23rd 1989) in the fashion section published in *Le Figaro*, a French national newspaper,¹¹ as follows:

Issey Miyake is spectacular: [...] dresses for women from another planet, in pleated silk in reliefs articulated to the elbows, arms or waist as it would be for samurai armour - armour of silk which evokes the robot of tomorrow and the goddess of science fiction. [...] Miyake is designer, artist, visionary. The third millennium interests him!¹² (*Le Figaro*, March 20th 1989)

In this text, by using the adjective "spectacular", the journalist uses some opposing stereotypical expressions that evoke, on the one hand Japanese tradition (samurai armour), and on the other, innovation ("visionary", "women from another planet", "the robot of tomorrow and the goddess of science fiction", "The third millennium"). These expressions, instead of 'exotic', describing fashions that are not similar to French fashions, are used to add value to Miyake and emphasise the positive. As another

⁹ It is true that the Kenzo brand has been owned by the French luxury group LVMH since 1993, and since 1999 Kenzo has not been the designer of his brand, although the brand name remains Kenzo.

¹⁰ I refer to the article on Kenzo Takada in *le Dictionnaire de la Mode au XXe siècle*.

¹¹ I examined issues of the French newspaper *Le Figaro* published between 1981 and 1992. In *Le Figaro*, which reports almost all fashion shows, I found 105 articles on Japanese fashion designers, in particular, Yohji Yamamoto, Kawakubo Rei and Issey Miyake.

¹² Original text: "Issey Miyaké est spectaculaire : Médusés, nous avons vu hier défiler la mode d'un visionnaire qui crée sans souvenirs, sans références, sans mémoire, dans une recherche perpétuelle de mouvements et de matériaux. [...] des robes pour femme d'une autre planète, en soie plissée dans des reliefs articulés aux coudes, aux bras ou à la taille comme pouvaient l'être les armures des samouraïs. Armures de soie qui évoquent aussi les robots de demain et les déesses de science-fiction. [...] Miyaké est à la fois couturier, artiste, visionnaire. Le 3^e millénaire l'intéresse!"

example I also found, “Issey Miyake: Art or fashion?” (*Le Figaro*, October 22nd 1990). These terms, art or evoking the future, are used to create in the reader the desire to support Miyake’s fashion. When his fashion is exotic, that is, far from Occidental traditional standard, it is positively represented as art or futurism, which is not the usual way to represent the occidental.

(3) Rei Kawakubo: exoticism detested as violence: invasion, survivor of atomic bomb, auto-destruction

Rei Kawakubo, Japanese designer, born in Tokyo in Japan in 1942, worked firstly for the Asahi Kasei textile company. In 1973, she launched her prêt-à-porter brand Comme des Garçons. She showed her first collection in 1981 in Paris. Since the spring and summer Parisian prêt-à-porter collections of 1983, Kawakubo, with another Japanese designer Yohji Yamamoto, impressed observers of fashion. She embodied the ideas of the avant-garde on presenting a look known as the ‘poor look’, although from 1986 some journalists criticised her creations, which became more occidental, that is, commercial. The creations of Comme des Garçons try to shatter the values of occidental fashion and are always controversial in French media¹³. That is, Rei Kawakubo’s creations are considered exotic fashion, far from the European norm. I found that Kawakubo’s creations were treated in three ways in French media of 1980’s, in particular in the French national newspapers such as *Le Figaro*¹⁴. I will present some examples.

Kawakubo arrived in French fashion in the 1980s when, because of strong Japanese economic power in the European market, French media diffused a negative image of Japan rather than a positive one in order to criticise what they saw as economic invasion. In representing Kawakubo’s fashion, *Libération* first associated it with militarism, as in the following: “pale and gloomy models, striding along the podium in Prussian manner (did I not say before that the Japanese are the Prussians of the Asia?)” (*Libération*, March 20th 1983).

¹³ I refer to the article on *Comme des Garçons* in *le Dictionnaire de la Mode au XXe siècle*.

¹⁴ The first article of *Le Figaro* on the “Japanese phenomenon” that is the fashion of Rei Kawakubo and Yamamoto Yohji was published on October 21st 1982, while *Libération*’s article was published on October 17th and 18th 1981. I examined issues of *Le Figaro* and *Libération* published between 1981 and 1992. In *Libération*, I found 37 articles on Japanese fashion designers, in particular, 19 articles on Yohji Yamamoto, 12 articles on Kawakubo Rei and 6 articles on Issey Miyake.

The expression “in Prussian style” makes reference to the strict discipline of Prussian soldiers, and “the Prussians” refers to German soldiers under Prussian hegemony.

What is more, the exoticism of Kawakubo’s fashion is sometimes interpreted as the result of the atomic bomb: “With an *hors-d’uvre* of Japanese speciality served by a Nippon company Comme des Garçons. Her apocalyptic vision of the clothes: holes, rags, as though for the survivors of nuclear catastrophe” (*Le Figaro*, October 21st 1982).

The Fashion of Comme des Garçons has neither rapport with the atomic bomb nor any explicit evocation of Hiroshima. But, needless to say, this expression “Her apocalyptic vision of the clothes: holes, rags, as though for the survivors of nuclear catastrophe” easily evokes the memory of Hiroshima.

The exoticism of Kawakubo’s fashion is also represented as alienation or self-destruction: “*Comme des Garçons ou comme des folles* (‘as boys or as crazies’): Where are we? At a fashion show or a psychiatric refuge?” (*Le Figaro*, October 21st 1982).

Thus, the exoticism of the Comme des Garçons fashion is represented through violence, through the victims of the atomic bomb, or through insanity in 1980’s.

By way of conclusion

I find several interpretations of the exoticisms of Japanese fashion: immaturity that has continued for more than a century, appropriation, sublimation into art, the abhorrence of violence, victimhood and insanity in the 1980s.

Could it not be said that these exotic images of Japan, which has been reconstructed and reinforced through these representations of Japanese fashion by French viewers, could be considered a kind of Japanese identity constructed through other’s eyes?

What’s more, bearing in mind I mentioned that “the other could be necessary to construct the identity of the self”, why do the French receive – sometimes yearn for, sometimes detest – Japanese fashion? How are these exotic images of Japanese fashion constructed by French media, and would they function as devices to reflect/construct French identity? Why do Japanese designers such as Kenzo Takada and Issey Miyake feature on the

website of France's Ministry of Culture and Communication? Which kind of French identity would be constructed through reception of Japanese fashion's exoticism?

Before I examine this question, I will talk about the role of French fashion in Japan. It could be said that Japan also receives French fashion and uses it to construct an identity. Japan started adopting occidental clothes in the Meiji era, especially men, although elite women and geishas also adopted such clothing¹⁵. In the Taisho era, French fashion, such as the *garçonne* style, diffused among certain Japanese women, who were called *moga* (modern girls).

After WWII, and since the period in which Japan rushed to modernise/Occidentalise, French fashion has also been accepted by the Japanese general public, as shown by the long skirt, which was a new look by French fashion designer Christian Dior just after WWII, the popularity of European brands such as Louis Vuitton from 1970, and so on. Modernisation in the post-WWII realm of fashion in general could be said to be the localisation of French fashion as followed by Americans, although the manner by which French Fashion was acculturated in Japan after WWII changed according to the Japanese social context.

As Koichi Iwabuchi quotes:

Japan is a non-Western nation that has most sincerely and successfully absorbed Western civilisation and culture [...]. Here, the Japanese mode of indigenized modernity is articulated as the model for other (East) Asian nations where Western civilisation has been rapidly and eagerly indigenized. This is again reminiscent of the fact that Japan's Imperialist claim of its superiority over other Asians was based upon its experience of quick, successful Westernisation [...]. Only submission to Western cultural power made it at all possible for Japan to differentiate itself from other "backward" Asian nations. (Iwabuchi 2006: 24).

Since opening up to foreign influence, Japan has sincerely tried to Westernise all its cultural domains, including fashion. Thus the reception of French fashion, which might be considered dominant on the world stage, could be seen in Japan as a device permitting the Japanese people to construct an identity of superiority over other Asians. However, what

¹⁵ In *Madame Sadayakko*, 『日曜新聞』(*Nichiyo shinbun* published in January 1872), 「支那風二剃髪シテ洋服ヲ着用シテ月琴ヲ携ヘテ客ニ招カレ酒席ニモテハヤサルヨシナリ」 ([the geisha] had her hair cut in a Chinese style, wore Western clothes and carried the Chinese koto musical instrument. She was invited out and lionised by her clients at their drinking party) (Downer, 2007: 35).

function does the exotic image of Japanese fashion have in the construction of the French identity? As E. Said said,

“Orientalism refers to myths and stereotypes produced by generations of writers, artists and administrators in the West of the Orient and the oriental as exotic, indolent devious and untrustworthy; no representation of the East has been free of this ideological construction of the Orient as the other to its own self-image as the model of rationality and civilization” (A glossary...2003: 183).

Could it be said the Japanese Fashion described as exotic fashion are used in several way to affirm and reinforce the superiority of Western women and fashion which could dominate others in several way, even now or not? Would the Japanese Fashion described as exotic fashion be accepted in France to “amuse themselves a little”, as P.Loti wrote?

References

- Beilleveaire, P. “L'autre de l'autre” Contribution à l'histoire des représentations de la femme japonaise. In *Mots N. 41 Parler du Japon*: 56-98.
- Downer, L. 2007. *Madam Sadayakko*, trans. Hideaki Kimura, Tokyo: Shueisha.
- Loti, P. 1990. *Madame Chrysanthème*, Paris: GF Flammarion.
- Pons, P. and Souyri, P.-F. 2000. *Le Japon des Japonais*, Paris : Seuil.
- Morean, B. 2006. The orient strikes back. In *Theory, Culture & Society*, 13 (3), 77-112.
- Butor, M. 1995. *Le Japon depuis la France un rêve à l'ancre*, Paris : Hatier.
- Cino, C. 2010. *Kawaii trop mignon le livre 100 pourcent Japon*, Paris : Larrouse.
- Garrigue, A., 2000. *Japonaises, La révolution douce*, Paris : Editions Philippe Picqui.
- Iwabuchi K. 2006. Postcolonial desire for Asia. In *Popular Culture, Globalization and Japan* (ed. Allen, M. and Sakamoto, R.), London: Routledge, 15-35.
- Koga, R. 2009. << Kawaii >> no teikoku (the empire of << kawaii >>), Tokyo: Seidosha.
- Koma, K. 2010a. Apparition of the term “Kawaii” in Representative National French Newspapers. In *Regionines Studijos* 4: 51-63.
- Koma, K. 2010b. La représentation de la femme japonaise dans Madame Chrysanthème de Pierre, Loti. In *Literatūra 2010* 52 (4), Vilnius: Vilnius University, 20-28.
- Koma, K. 2011. Apparition of the term “Kawaii” in Representative National French Newspapers. In *Japan as Represented in the European Media: Its analytical Methodologies and Theories In Comparison with Korean case* (ed. Koma, K.), Kaunas: Vytautas Magnus University, 13-36.
- Koma, K. 2012. (on press), Acculturation of French fashion in Japan after WWII: Fashion as device constructing identity. In *The Acta Orientalia Vilnensia 2011* (ed. Koma, K.), Vilnius: Vilnius university.
- Loti, P. 1990. *Madame Chrysanthème*, Paris: GF Flammarion.
- Napier, S. J. 2007. *From Impressionism to Anime: Japan as Fantasy and Fan Cult in the Mind of the West*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Moura, J.-M. 1992. *Lire l'exotisme*, Paris: Dunot.

- Pons, P. and Souyri, P. F. 2000. *Le Japon des Japonais*, Paris: Seuil.
- Veillon, C. 2008. *L'Art contemporain japonais : une quête d'identité, de 1990 à nos jours*, Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Fukai, A. 1996. *Japanism in Fashion*, Kyoto: Kyoto Fukusyoku Bunka Zaidan.
- De Margerie, G. 2009. *Dictionnaire du Look*, Paris: Robert Laffont.
- Zykas, A. 2011. The Discourses of Popular Culture in 21st Century Japan's Cultural Diplomacy agenda. In *Reception of Japanese and Korean Popular Culture in Europe* (ed. Koma, K.), Kaunas: Vytautas Magnus University. 153-170.
- Brooker, P. 2003. *A glossary of cultural theory*, London Publisher.
- Dictionnaire de la Mode au XXe siècle* (Dictionary of the Fashion in 20th century) 1996, Paris: Edition du Regard.

Abstract

As Kiyokazu Washida said, "Clothes Make People" (Washida 1993: 12), it could be said that clothing fashion has a great role in the formation of identity. In the modern and contemporary period, when the self and the world are imagined and diffused under the influence of globalised media development, it seems to us that the 'identity' of our period is perceived at the crossing of how I and others look. Based on this idea, in our paper, I will discuss how the 'identities' of Japanese women has been constructed through the acceptance of Japanese fashion represented in French Media. Japanese fashion has been present in France since the end of the 19th century. The First wave of Japanese fashion in Paris was the kimono at the end of the 19th/beginning of 20th century. The second wave of the Japanese fashion in Paris began at the beginning of the 1970s when fashion designer Kenzo Takada came to Paris to launch his prêt-à-porter collection – such collections are followed closely by Japanese people within fashion. This influence created a base that prepared for the success of Japanese fashion designers such as Comme des garçons and Yohji Yamamoto in the 1980s. In the 1990s, not only Japanese professional designers but also Japanese street Fashion, which came from Japan to France as *kawaii* ('cute' in English) fashion and started to influence French fashion. Our hypothesis is that even if I have 4 periods in which Japanese fashion was in vogue in France, the identity of Japanese women has tended to be constructed as exotic: 'immature' or 'incomprehensible', which are far from *Femme* ('woman' in English) in France through Japanese fashion represented in French Media. I would like to make clear this process of the construction of Japanese identity by others.

Santrauka

Kaip teigia Kiyokazu Washida, „rūbai kuria žmones“ (Washida 1993:12). Galima sakyti, jog drabužių mados vaidmuo formuojant identitetą labai svarbus. Moderniuoju ir šiuolaikiniu laikotarpiu, kai asmens tapatybės ir pasaulio vaizdinius bei sklaidą veikia globali žiniasklaidos raida, galima manyti,

kad mūsų laikmečiu tapatybė suvokiama „tarp“: to, kaip atrodau aš, ir kaip atrodo kiti. Remiantis šiuo teiginiu, straipsnyje apžvelgiamas japonės moters tapatybės formavimasis, analizuojant japonų mados reprezentavimą Prancūzijos žiniasklaidoje. Japonijos mada atkeliavo į Prancūziją XIX a. pab. Pirmoji japoniškos mados banga Paryžiuje tapo kimono pristatymas XIX a. pab.–XX a. pr. Antroji japoniškos mados banga prasidėjo 1970-ųjų pradžioje, kai dizaineris Kenzo Takada Paryžiuje pristatė savo *prêt-à-porter* kolekciją. Ši kolekcija atvėrė kelią kitų Japonijos dizainerių sėkmei – „Comme des Garçons“ ir Yohji Yamamoto (1980-iejai). 1990-aisiais prancūzų madai įtakos turėjo ne vien profesionalių Japonijos dizainerių darbai, bet ir gatvės mada, kuri atkeliavo iš Japonijos į Prancūziją kaip *kawaii* (liet. „mielas, gražus“) mada. Šiame straipsnyje remiamasi hipoteze, kad nors Prancūzijoje pastebimi keturi japonų mados populiarumo laikotarpiai, kuriant japonės moters paveikslą vis dėlto akcentuojamas egzotiškumas. Ji apibūdinama kaip „nesubrendusi“ ar „nesuprantama“, o tai yra nesuderinama su prancūziškuoju *femme* (liet. „moters“) įvaizdžiu. Šiame straipsnyje bandoma atskleisti japoniško identiteto kūrimosi procesą už Japonijos ribų.