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It's all in the fold: An historical, transnational and material investigation to understand the 2010's Kimono Jacket Trend

Abstract

This article investigates a fashion trend during the first half of the 2010's for a garment that looked little like the indigenous kimono, was often designed and manufactured in centres other than Japan and was largely intended for consumption outside of Japan, but none-the-less was marketed as kimono. Rather than reflecting on the ways in which this trend could be viewed as another example of cultural appropriation in the fashion industry or demonstrative of the fashion industry's attempt to maximize profit by flooding the market with endless variations of these garments that resonate rather tired Orientalized stereotypes, this article examines how the ways in which the kimono has been transformed as it moves through time and across borders resonate with this trend and seeks to better understand the political, social, cultural and economic drivers behind such transformations. It also brings to light new developments in this garment's cultural meanings.

Keywords

kimono, bohemian, boho chic, kimono jacket, festival fashion, drapery, fringe

Introduction

In the middle of a damp and cold summer in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England, a subway advertising panel featured a model in sunglasses, cropped top and shorts. Draped over her shoulders is a snakeskin-print garment identified as a kimono (figure 1). Perhaps intended to inspire those leaving for warmer climes on their holidays rather than welcoming visitors to the city, this advertisement highlights the ubiquity of the kimono on the fashion landscape in the mid 2010's. The featured garment was retailed by boohoo, a global etailer of inexpensive fashion driven by current trends and aimed at cash strapped 16-24 year olds. Retailing at a mere £15, this inexpensive 'kimono' demonstrates market saturation in 2015. In that year, *Times Style* claimed that "the kimono is the most useful piece of clothing a

woman can own” (Sykes 2015). In the popular press and across social media, the garment’s role as a statement piece and its versatility were cited as reasons accounting for its popularity. It could be worn as a jacket, cover up or lingerie in multiple settings – worn as festival, evening, special occasion, beach or casual wear. As one kimono wearer explained, the kimono can be dressed up or down: worn as “casual wear with a plain tee and jeans it adds some glamour and elegance...for a date, you can make it as dressy as you like by accessorizing with heels and jewellery” (Student respondent 2014).

It is not surprising to witness such a garment resurfacing on the global fashion scene in the 2010’s given the kimono’s momentous and continuing inspiration in Japanese and global fashion, from haute couture to the high street, as well as in subculture dress. However, given the diversity of function, form, motif and material in this latest incarnation, it may seem curious that the term ‘kimono’ was used as a catch-all to categorise garments that sometimes look little like the indigenous garment, were often designed and manufactured in centres other than Japan and were largely intended for consumption outside of Japan. The fit and length of these garments varied from unfitted to fitted, waist to full length. The qualifiers ‘jacket’, ‘duster’ or ‘maxi’ were often added to marketing material to specify the length of the garment on offer. The patterning of these garments was a bit of a free for all, drawing from diverse inspirations including Japanese, Chinese, Indian, Meso-American and African sources; flora and fauna in a three-dimensional European tradition; and even animal prints or snake skin, the latter demonstrated in the boohoo kimono (figure 1). Many of these garments were also constructed of lace, devoré or embellished with fringe or tassels, materials quite absent from kimonos made for the Japanese market historically.

This article asks why the term ‘kimono’ was applied to a garment that in form, material and pattern differs dramatically from its historical namesake and examines the ways in which it functions as a hybrid or liminal space into which form and meaning are

continuously recombined. My intent is not to try to measure authenticity or flag appropriation but to understand its sartorial success and demonstrate how this fashion trend, that would otherwise escape critical scholarly attention despite its prevalence in the early 2010's, serves as a model through which to explore the multidirectional transnational encounters materialised in fashion garments. In her provocative article, 'Fashion's Cultural Appropriation Debate: Pointless', Minh-Ha T. Pham advocates "inappropriate discourse", in which the social and aesthetic history of a garment is brought to light in order to illustrate the fluid, multidirectional exchange of fashion inspiration across space and time, which weakens the binaries that are reinforced by appropriation debates where a singular instance of a 'dominant' culture (West, rich, modern, high fashion) takes from 'subordinate' culture (East/Other, poor, traditional, low fashion) (2014). Pham further suggests moving away from the focus on fashion production as primarily a creative process to critique the economic factors underlining production (2014). This is why examining a low-end trend is so useful. As Sarah Cheang and I have argued, "fashion speaks to communities across borders, involving interlingual processes and translations across cultures, media, and industrial and commercial sectors" (Cheang and Kramer 2017: 145). Likewise, this article will focus on the economic, social and aesthetic factors underpinning the transformation of the kimono through time and across space, from the seventeenth century to the mid 2010's.

To mark the liminality of this garment and distinguish it from the indigenous Japanese national garment, I will use the term 'kimono jacket', but would like to emphasise that 'kimono' is bandied about quite freely as a google search will demonstrate. An historic overview of the different ways in which manufacturers, retailers and consumers have transformed, marketed or worn the kimono will be elucidated and how these interactions have contributed to the accumulated meanings of the kimono and the garments inspired by it, such as the kimono jacket, will be explored. Additionally, this article examines new developments

arising in the context of the 2010's particularly with regard to boho-chic lifestyle branding, festival fashion and rising consumer engagement with issues of sustainability. Object analysis of kimono jackets provides evidence that these seemingly mundane garments demonstrate the folding in and out of multiple meanings. No edge delineates the fold, rather it is a site of instability encouraging fluid and dynamic relationships (Codell 2012; Deleuze 1992). In their investigation of upcycling secondhand kimono into new garments, Terry Satsuki Milhaupt and Hazel Clark discuss the ways in which the kimono "can be physically reshaped to conform to new cultural and historical settings [contributing] to its seemingly effortless passage across geographic and generational borders" (Milhaupt and Clark 2004). This investigation builds on the reconfiguration of vintage kimono by discussing how newly mass-manufactured garments came to be recognised as kimono (jackets).

To achieve these aims, this article considers the meanings folded into the kimono jackets of the 2010's trend through object analysis of my own garments purchased between 2014 and 2019 (figure 2). This object analysis is supported by a qualitative study that I conducted of kimono wearers during the trend. Between 2014 and 2017, I led a yearly seminar workshop with my second-year Fashion Design students in which students were invited to wear or bring along their own kimonos for object analysis. If they did not have one, they were encouraged to analyse one in a shop, select and bring along an online example or examine one of mine. If they were willing to participate in my research, students were invited to anonymously complete a survey (figure 3). They were asked to describe their kimono jacket, detail where and when they bought it, and when and why they wore it. They were further asked to contemplate in what ways their garment resembled or differed from a kimono and why they thought that the term 'kimono' had been used to describe such a diverse range of garments (figure 4). I invited these students to participate because of their strong knowledge of the fashion industry and design but also as keen, trend-conscious fashion

consumers in the 18-22-year-old age group. Additionally, as I deliver a lecture on kimono fashion history to these students in their first year of study that includes a seminar in which they analyse a range of twentieth-century kimono from my own teaching collection including *furisode*, *juban*, *haori*, *houmongi* and a 1950s souvenir export kimono, I felt that they were equipped with at least elementary knowledge of indigenous kimono construction, design and use in advance of analysing the 2010's trend.

Thirdly, this article analyses the fashion design, communication and marketing around the kimono jacket trend. Between October 2014 and 2016 I surveyed a number of high street and boutique fashion websites¹ recording the number of kimonos that they were selling, the language used to describe these and the ways in which they were visually presented to the viewer, noting transformations that occurred to freshen and prolong the trend. Comparing my and my students' object analysis and observations to the ways in which 2010's kimono jackets were marketed provides the foundation for this analysis.

The Kimono in Fashion History

This paper responds to a sea-change in fashion studies that has been gaining pace over the past twenty years. The lingering belief that fashion is a phenomenon associated with western culture exported to the rest of the world has been successfully challenged by scholarship that reveals the Eurocentricity that has underpinned much of twentieth century fashion studies.² Fashion systems developing and existing outside of Europe are likewise being researched and efforts to reframe the discipline to better illustrate the complex, dynamic, multi-directional flows of fashion between cultures and nations is being undertaken.³ These developments can be seen in relation to the Japanese kimono. Exhibitions such as *Japonism in Fashion* (1989-2004)⁴ and *Kimono Refashioned* (2018-19)⁵ demonstrate the profound, global inspiration that kimono have held for designers historically and today (*japonisme et mode* 1996; *Mōdo no japonisumu* 1996; Morishima and Nii 2018),

while *Kimono: From Kyoto to Catwalk* (2020) focuses on the historic and contemporary sartorial and social significance of the garment itself (Jackson 2020).⁶ Kimono is a transnational garment when it has been re-imagined outside but also within Japan. Kimono producers and wearers have long been interested in incorporating novel and exotic foreign influences and this has become a major point of discussion in recent fashion studies even outside of Japan (Cliffe 2017; Francks 2015; Jackson 2015; Milhaupt 2014). The garment's origins reveal interregional fashion influences from the start: Japanese dress of the Asuka and Nara Periods (538-710 and 710-794) closely drew on Tang Dynasty clothing from China and particular features became integrated within the kimono (Dalby 2001: 243). Milhaupt persuasively demonstrated the “existence of an organized and interdependent organisation of clothing production in Japan from as early as the seventeenth century that provided the underpinnings of the modern kimono fashion system” (2014: 11). She details the ways in which the introduction of new technologies, fibers, material, dyes and motifs from outside of Japan impacted upon kimono design, manufacture, marketing and consumption from the seventeenth century to today.

World War II severely disrupted the kimono fashion system. However, despite significant challenges, the twenty-first century witnessed a Kimono Renaissance, in which more Japanese have started to incorporate kimono into their everyday wear. Active innovation in kimono design, particularly with regard to material and patterning, increasingly features in twenty-first century kimono production in Japan, as does dynamic kimono styling (Jackson 2020; Cliffe 2017 and Okazaki 2015). Thanks to the internet, this renaissance has spread outside of Japan. The internet provides the opportunity to purchase kimono, learn of their social, cultural and historic significance, and receive instruction on how to wear them to kimono enthusiasts globally. A number of books written in the English language exploring

contemporary kimono fashion sit alongside such sites, attesting to the growing international view of kimonos as fashionable attire.⁷

This article focuses on understanding a particular incarnation of the kimono, the kimono jacket trend of the early 2010s' as witnessed on the high street in the United Kingdom and North America –but not confined to it. In learning about my kimono jacket research, a Japanese friend showed me a kimono jacket that her sister had purchased at Zara in Tokyo in 2014 (figure 5). Manufactured in Morocco, it has tailored sleeves but a loose fit and motifs associated with kimono design: an anecdotal but good example of the intricate, global reach of fashion. Intricate webs of production and consumption of kimono and kimono-like garments outside of Japan have existed for hundreds of years, disrupting the persistence of the premise that fashion in a non-Western context is a recent product of globalization (Jansen and Craik 2016: 1) or that the innovative adaptation of novel forms, colours, materials and motifs occurs only in European fashion design. To understand the many folds of meaning that contributed to the kimono jacket's popularity, it is important to first locate this fashion in relation to the history of design, retail and consumption of the kimono outside of Japan. This history is crucial in laying the foundation for understanding the kimono jacket's form as well as relationship to boho chic lifestyle branding.

By no means is this focus meant to suggest that such a history exists or developed separately from Japan. The term 'kimono' itself arises from Japan's renewed contact with the outside world after it conceded to reopen its ports after over 150 years of self-imposed isolation. Kimono, meaning 'thing worn' came to be used as an umbrella term under which Japanese garments called by many names determined by subtle variations, such as sleeve length or intended wearer, were categorised in response to this international encounter with the unfamiliar dress of foreigners (Dalby 2001: 65-69).

Foreign enthusiasm for Japanese garments as fashionable wear has a long history. During the Edo period, just as Indian chintz made its way via the Dutch East India Company to Japan, *Japone rocken* made their way back to the Netherlands where they were worn by men as fashionable dressing gowns. In the seventeenth century, a complex global network emerged in response to demand for *Japone rocken*. So great was the desire for these garments, that in addition to their production in Japan, the Dutch East India Company began manufacturing them for European markets in India (Fukai 1996) and they were further made in China, from where uncut textiles were also exported to be tailored in Holland (Peck 2013; Corrigan et al 2015), demonstrating a global flow in multiple directions.

Following the opening of Japanese ports in the late 1850's, the kimono became a highly collectable art object and increasingly a fashionable garment worn by non-Japanese women. In addition to theatrical wear (fancy dress or stage) kimono were adapted as dressing or tea gowns in the home. Akiko Fukai points out that kimono dressing gowns were worn in “a distinctly Western style, not tightly overlapping in the Japanese manner, but open to the waist and belted” (1996). This loose styling lent itself well to the concerns of dress reformers and Aesthetes.⁸ In the late nineteenth century, dress reformers argued that the unnatural forms and colouring of fashionable dress, achieved through the use of stays, corsets and aniline dyes, were as ugly as they were harmful to health. Eastern dress, such as the kimono with its flowing form, was viewed as a comfortable alternative. The beauty of the material in which kimono were constructed and embellished further appealed to members of the Aesthetic Movement who were drawn to beautiful and sensuous qualities in their quest that life should imitate art. Inspired by this doctrine, homemakers wishing to pursue an artistic, tasteful lifestyle consumed Japanese objects for the home, including kimonos as drapery and to wear.⁹

Export kimonos became increasingly fashionable in the early twentieth century. This phenomenon resulted from a realisation in Japan that there was a profitable market for such garments (Savas 2017; Suoh 2017; Yamaguchi 2017). An analysis of the features of export kimonos “show[s] the highly effective ways in which kimonos were ‘translated’ from Japanese culture to the very different cultural language of British society” by savvy Japanese kimono manufacturers (Savas 2017: 176). A major difference between indigenous and export kimonos was in the silhouette: while a kimono for Japanese consumption has a linear silhouette, cloth was added to both sides of an export kimono, resembling a skirt. Export kimonos also featured tassels, sash loops, and fringed or tasselled sashes, features not included in Japanese kimono design. Kimono designed for the export market also predominantly featured elaborate, embroidered motifs commonly associated with Japan, such as cherry blossoms, wisteria and chrysanthemums. While embroidered motifs were esteemed in export kimono design, resist-dying was all the rage in kimono design for the Japanese market (Rado 2015: 591). Pale shades such as white and pink were particularly popular in early 20th-century Edwardian fashion and stand in stark contrast to the bright colours predominant in Meiji-period kimono fashion, given the enthusiasm for the novel colours produced by chemical dyes recently introduced in Japan (Savas 2017: 173). Export kimonos were manufactured in a range of lengths, materials and embellishments to ensure they were accessible to multiple purses, from full-length, silk-lined and embroidered, silk-crepe gowns including embroidered sashes to inexpensive half-length garments made of printed cotton (Yamaguchi 2017: 102).

Kimono or kimono-like garments donned by artistically and politically minded groups at the turn of the twentieth century further linked the garment to activism. Fashion, particularly Oriental dress became an important feature in constructing the image of the modern woman at this time. The perceived comfort of the kimono appealed to suffragettes as

it had to the Aesthetes and dress reformers of the nineteenth century. The fashionability of the garment "...was a way for reformers to soften the accusations of masculinization by opponents to women's suffrage" whose message was bound to be considered in a positive light if delivered by "attractive messengers" (Rabinovitch-Fox, 2015: 17, 19). In Greenwich Village, some feminists even created their own dress based on kimono, epitomized by the 'Village smock', which they wore in private and public. "By shifting the meaning of the kimono from a 'private' costume to be worn at home to an everyday outfit suitable for public wear feminists used their attire to challenge the gendered division between the private and public spheres" (Rabinovitch-Fox, 2015: 27).

Kimono were again embraced by the Hippie Movement of the late 1960's and 70's. Distinctive dress frequently sourced from other cultures marked out youthful participants, who did not want to act, look or think like their parents. From the 1960s onward, more young people were travelling than ever before and returning home with decorative objects, textiles and garments in a range of luxurious materials, "that contributed to a form of hippie dress marked by vibrant bricolage" (Whitley 2013: 96). These acquisitions were not simply aesthetic.

Back-to-nature hippies, in particular, perceived many 'primitive' cultures as more natural than their own, lacking the materialism of corporate-controlled Western society. In adopting their dress, they strove to achieve a better, more meaningful way of life. This aura of authenticity imparted a certain cachet to the wearer, while significantly increasing the rich buffet of fashion available to hippies in their quest for individuality (Whitley 2013: 18).

While the snap shots above only scratch the surface of how the kimono was transformed as a fashionable garment for a foreign market since the seventeenth century, they are intended to demonstrate how transnational encounters have reshaped it structurally and embedded new social, cultural and political meanings into it. The flowing, loose forms in luxurious materials and embellishments that were created for, and esteemed, in these new markets and the meanings that they embody resonate in kimono jacket design of the 2010s.

The 2010's Kimono Jacket Trend and Boho Chic

In turning to the kimono jacket trend, the associations between the kimono, bohemian lifestyle, individuality and activism are deliberately referenced in fashion design and promotion. Historically bohemians, such as those associated with the Aesthetic or Hippie Movements, sought to experience something more authentic than “the materialism of corporate-controlled Western society” (Whitley 2013: 18), but through the portrayal of bohemians in mass media, bohemianism has been popularised and paradoxically commercialised (Wilson 1999) and this has intensified since the introduction of social media. Though the political motivation may have dulled, this desire to differentiate oneself sartorially in a sea of similar mass-produced garments remains. Vintage kimono, kimono jackets and other kimono-style garments were worn by celebrities such as Kate Moss, Mary-Kate Olsen and Sienna Miller from the mid 2000's in a style influenced by historic bohemian and hippie dress known as boho-chic. This look was eagerly consumed via social media and reproduced. The boho chic style is recognised by its flowy garments featuring unexpected combinations of pattern or colours, and garments and accessories that are vintage, exotic, luxurious or intricately embellished. These objects are emblematic of creative talent, the cultivation of beauty and individuality, characteristics associated with the boho-chic lifestyle. Kimono jackets tick all of these boxes. Like hippie and bohemian dress, boho chic clothing and objects are meant to set apart their wearers from the mainstream. Pseudo-individuality is promised to consumers through boho-chic fashion and accessories through their formal and decorative features even though they are largely mass-manufactured.

This can be seen, for example in the brand narratives of two LA-based boutiques, Cleobella and Phraseology,¹⁰ which cater to the boho chic lifestyle and include kimono jackets in their offerings. Phraseology claimed to design for “independent, free spirited individuals...the storytellers, the dreamers, the believers, and artists” (“About Us” 2016),

while Cleobella declared that they design for the “travel bound, timeless bohemian who’s always on the search for genuine style inspiration” (“Boutique” 2016). Cleobella’s reference to travelling and sourcing ‘exotic’ materials recalls the hippie traveller searching the globe for a more meaningful way of life expressed through the textiles and garments discovered along the way, and this is confirmed in the company’s ‘Our Story’ video, which depicts the designer’s quest for inspiration and meaning in design and life (2018). Such connections were recognised by my student respondents. When asked what accounted for the kimono jacket’s popularity, one respondent answered that they were, “fashionable in a bohemian sense to reflect the idea of being cultured [or] well travelled” (2014).

The materials in which kimono jackets are constructed are essential in signifying boho chic. Not only do they signal style but also contribute to kimono jackets’ ability to serve as statement pieces: attention grabbing clothing or accessories that say something about the wearer, a method of sartorial expression first popularised through streetwear fashion blogs (Nozari 2015). Kimono jackets are often constructed in embellished velvet, silk or synthetics mimicking the qualities of luxurious fabrics. One student respondent confided, “I bought this jacket in 2015 as I felt it was very unique and would be a good statement/staple piece for my wardrobe. The detailed embroidery stood out to me...” and “[I] liked the velvet fabric. [It] makes me feel sophisticated/glam” (Student respondent 2017). An emphasis on luxurious material and embellishments can also be seen in my kimono jackets. The Jun Tassel Kimono and Denise kimono style bed jacket are constructed of silk or silk and rayon respectively (figure 6 and figure 7) and are elaborated in tassels or fringe and scattered devoré velvet motifs. A kimono-style embroidered shirt dress purchased from Zara in 2018 is constructed of polyester simulating silk and features a large, colourful embroidered peacock and scattered flowers in viscose thread not unlike the large satin-stitched embroideries featuring on the back of 20th-century export kimonos (figure 8).

The marketing of kimono jackets highlights the tactile traits of these garments as demonstrated by the Helix Velvet Burnout Beaded Fringe Duster marketed by Phraseology in 2015 (figure 9). Phraseology's Loft Life Collection lookbook depicts a model indulging in this luxurious kimono jacket. This image signifies the bohemian lifestyle through several further visual cues. The peach coloured jacket contrasts strongly with the snake skin patterned cropped top and trousers patterned in blue, pink and cream stylised floral motifs of Indian inspiration. This colourful ensemble recalls the 'gypsy' wear associated with bohemian dress. The backdrop to the fashion photo shoot appears to be a sparsely furnished, industrial loft conversion –a brick wall with multiple steel framed windows hints that this space formerly served an industrial function. This loft conversion and mass manufactured kimono jackets point to the inherent contradiction of bohemianism “between the desire for a personally meaningful, exciting and glamorous lifestyle and the lucrative nature of this lifestyle for post-industrial capitalism” (Forkert 2013: 149). Colin Campbell has pointed out that while bohemians rebelled against comfort and utility as understood by the middle class, they indulged in expensive pleasures demonstrating artistic tastes when able. “There is a repudiation of utilitarianism, but not for luxury, in the form of exquisite, rare and beautiful objects of little use” (Campbell 1994: 200). This observation is exemplified in the second photograph from the lookbook in which the model runs the tassels of her garment through her fingers, an act brought into sharp focus by blurring her enraptured face. It was a recurring point of amusement in the object analysis seminars that I ran with my students just how treacherous it was to cook, eat or use the toilet in fringed kimono jackets. This is exemplified in the overindulgent 20” fringe embellishing all hems of my handmade kimono jacket purchased from etsy.com vender velvetcoscos in 2019 (figure 10).

Fringe is associated with luxury as historically trimmings were costly, fine and rare until Victorian industrial production made them more affordable (Freedgood 2002: 26).

Fringes, tassels and other elaborate trimmings have also been historically associated with exotic, luxurious textiles from the East. Their appearance on kimono jackets bears a striking similarity to another non-tailored garment, the Chinese shawl. This resemblance is strengthened by the frequent occurrence of the evenly scattered arrangement of embroidered or velvet devoré floral motifs on kimono jackets, as can be seen, for example, on the Denise kimono style bed jacket or velvetcoscos kimono jacket (figures 7 and 10). Indeed, the latter example has been constructed out of a piano fringe shawl by the etsy.com maker. The Chinese shawl, or Manila shawl, has a complex international history as a Chinese export item historically purchased by the Spanish at the port of Manila and passing through Mexico en route to Seville. The blending of Chinese features and marketing of mandarin robes as export kimono in the early twentieth century has been explained by Mei Mei Rado as “a hybrid form that simultaneously evoked China and Japan within a comprehensible framework, reinforcing stereotypical Western notions of Japanese style while formulating an idealized Oriental image” (2015: 598). This explanation can be applied to the 2010’s context as well but should be expanded in the case of the kimono jacket, given the diversity of exotic forms and motifs recombined into the garment, all resonating the luxurious, exotic, intricate characteristics associated with boho chic. As in the late 19th century, the term ‘kimono’ is called upon again as an umbrella term given its recognition as an art form and its long history as chic, stylish garment to encompass the eclectic diversity composing boho chic.

The material, fringe and construction of kimono jackets lend to, or enhance their draped quality. Many student respondents identified the draped, loose-fitting or oversized quality of their kimono jackets as a key feature linking them to the kimono (figure 4). This feature was highlighted in the marketing of kimono jackets as well. For example, Abercrombie and Fitch described one of their kimono jackets as “effortless drapery” on their website (“Reid Kimono” 2014). Drapery is a key feature of my kimono jackets and four of

these use a draped affect to simulate the appearance of wide sleeves.¹¹ Wide sleeves was another key feature that the students identified linking kimono jackets back to kimono (figure 4). Indeed, after the first Japanese women in kimono to travel to Europe were displayed at the 1867 Exposition Universelle in Paris, a Japanese style-wrap with wide sleeves appeared on the Parisian fashion scene (Fukai 2018: 5). As can be seen with the Free People Cocoon Wrap Kimono Jacket, before placed on the body, this garment is a one square piece of fabric folded over itself to form a rectangle (figure 11). The short sides have been seamed leaving a 10” opening for each arm at the top. The garment can be dressed by picking up the top layer of the frayed, unseamed fabric, centering it on the back of the neck and pushing one’s arms through the openings. The resulting draped form creates the illusion of the wide sleeves characteristically associated with the kimono. It is untailed like the kimono with straight seams, but in its dressing, more strongly resembles the loose way in which export kimonos were worn.

Drapery has long held connotations of timeless elegance, high culture and luxury. To elevate the domestic decoration in the Victorian period to an ‘artistic’ level, homemakers were encouraged to liberally drape textiles, including kimonos in their home. Domestic and dress advice writer, Mrs. Eliza Haweis insisted: “To be healthy and happy, we must have beautiful and pleasant things about us. If we cannot have trees and flowers, mountains and floods, we can have their echoes –architecture, painting, textile folds in changing light and shade” (1881: 6). Like fringe, drapery offers an aesthetically and bodily pleasing experience, exciting all of the senses, registering visually, tactilely and aurally, allowing for the “aestheticisation and elevation of the commodity” (Doy 2001: 228) of mass-produced kimono jackets. One student respondent stated that she ‘liked the loose fit and flow of the garment’ (2014) while another described her kimono jacket purchased from New Look as ‘floaty’ (2016). A third felt her kimono jacket offered ‘a breath of fresh air’ and ‘freedom’ in

contrast to the more familiar tailored fit of her clothing (2014). Wearing an untailed garment offers a different experience than tailored clothing, gracefully enhancing everyday movement.

One can image this dress form complimenting dancing too, perhaps at a music festival. A student respondent who bought her kimono at Topshop for festival wear emphasised her pleasure in its ‘tassels all round’ and ‘lot of volume in the fabric’ (2014). The way in which the kimono flows around the wearer is enhanced by the fabric from which it is constructed and even more so by the addition of fringe. As Gen Doy points out in her treatise on drapery, drapery has long been used by dancers to elevate the clothed form. “It mobilises connotations of high art and ideal physical grace and nobility around the female body” (Doy 2001: 54). The kimono jacket, characterised by ample fabric, encapsulates a realm of possibility in the dialogue between body and material.

The appearance of kimono jackets at music festivals contributed new cultural meaning to the garment. A student respondent named Coachella and Glastonbury festivals alongside kimono and kimono jacket-donning celebrities as major catalysts for the kimono jacket trend (2014). By 2014, kimonos were widely observed at music festivals, reported in fashion news and images of their styling shared throughout social media networks like Pintarest. Global retailer New Look, the number two women’s retailer in the UK, who targets female customers between 16-45 years of age,¹² reported selling 40,000 kimonos a week following the summer’s festivals in 2014 (Robinson). In 2014 and 2015, a number of the student respondents indicated that they had purchased their kimonos to wear at festivals (figure 3). One stated that she had purchased her kimono ‘2 years ago at Topshop for a festival’ (2014), revealing herself to have engaged very early with this trend. Music festivals have been and continue to be linked with bohemianism, given their artistic content, association with political or social activism (e.g. Bonnaroo), hedonism, sexual and substance

experimentation, and links to glamorous musicians and other celebrities (e.g. Woodstock, Glastonbury). Coachella Music Festival is associated with leading the fashion trends that dominate the festival circuit. Held in the Californian desert, clothing is kept to a minimum but kimono jackets feature prominently as a good way to deal with the day's heat and cool breeze at night.

Kimono jackets were widely marketed as essential festival wear (weather permitting). *Seventeen* magazine included the Desert Rose Velvet Fringe Kimono from Pretty Attitude among thirty essential boho trends for festival wear in 2016 (Stiegman). Pretty Attitude clearly referenced Coachella on its home page that same year through fashion photography featuring a model in the Desert Rose Kimono swaying in a kind of reverie as a hot sun sets behind her (figure 12). On the webpage the caption 'Desert Bound' and link entitled 'Shop Festival Fashions' was superimposed on this image, which had been cropped to obscure the roof tops. The brand describes itself as "a Rock 'n' Roll inspired online fashion destination for extraordinary girls who love to express their own personality with unique looks" ("Pretty Attitude" 2016). Blair Sabol famously discussed the strong connection between music and fashion in his 1970 article, observing:

Everyone knows that today's fashions are made by people...not by magazines or by collection showings...but by people who aren't afraid to wear their insides on their outsides. Today's most fashionable trend setters are the ones involved with today's music –rock (1970, 31).

Fashion retailers including, but certainly not limited to, New Look, Topshop and River Island included a sales category on their websites around festival fashion in which kimono jackets featured. In 2016, boohoo.com invited shoppers searching for festival wear to "Bop to the Beat in a Boho Inspired Kimono" (boohoo.com). Likewise, product descriptions of kimono jackets referenced festivals. For example, Abercrombie & Fitch described their white lace Keegan Kimono with a fringe trim hemline as "a festival-inspired look" ("Keegan Kimono" 2014).

A final development in the cultural meanings folded into the kimono is the way in which kimono jackets were brought into brand narratives to attract a new kind of consumer. This is the ethical consumer, who has a clear interest in making purchasing decisions that are environmentally or socially sustainable (Beard 2008). The kimono's long association with radical social or political stances carries a particular residue as seen in the marketing strategies of some niche companies. At first glance, Phraseology's website may seem a bit bewildering: a triptych depicts a red panda with the superimposed tag "We save wildlife!" sandwiched between two Caucasian models wearing kimonos with the tags "Shop Velvet" and "See What's New" (figure 13). This image hints at a new awareness of consumer responsibility and willingness to exploit this among marketers. As Nathaniel Dafydd Beard has observed, in a climate where "increasingly consumers are concerned about the 'ethical impact' their purchasing decisions have, both on the environment and on people", it is advisable "to build a business which is ethical from its inception" (2008: 449, 451). In their story detailing how Phraseology, which almost exclusively sold kimono jackets, came into being, the founders reinforced this seemingly unusual connection between the potential for profit and ecological sustainability: "A kimono was sewn, a wildlife center was contacted, lightning struck the earth, and PHRASEOLOGY was born" ("About Us" 2016).

Cleobella was also founded with an ethical business plan. Their accessories, clothing and home goods, which include the Ollie Kimono (figure 14), are produced by local artisans or in small factories in Bali from materials and textiles sourced locally with the goal of positively impacting upon the Balinese community. The floaty form in a fashionable snakeskin print of this maxi kimono is highlighted to be of interest to: "gypsy goddesses who wander the globe" and "modern bohemian babes" in the product description of the Ollie Kimono. Also highlighted in the product description is the brand's commitment to charitable activities.

None of my student respondents cited sustainability as a reason as to why they purchased their kimono jackets. I speculate that this could be attributed to budget (eco-fashion tends to be expensive) and age group (trend driven), but pursuing the matter further was out of the timeframe of this study. Nonetheless, the sustainable activities of Phraseology and Cleobella are fundamental to authenticating their boho products. While one could acquire a kimono jacket in a bewildering array of styles for a couple quid from boohoo, if a consumer has the desire and financial means, she could differentiate, authenticate and reinforce the image of a socially-concerned, unconventional, well-travelled, or unusually artistic lifestyle through identifying herself instead with brands such as Phraseology or Cleobella. There is a danger however that in channelling one's good intentions through consumption rather than political and social action, morality has become a mere ornament in fashion (Klein 2010; Kuldova 2015). For example, Tereza Kuldova has demonstrated in her investigation of philanthrocapitalism in relation to the luxury fashion industry in India that the luxury market depends on maintaining an artisanal force in poverty to support its charitable claims and justify its price tag (2015).

Conclusion

In the beginning of this article, I asked why the term 'kimono' had been selected to describe a garment that exhibited a wide range of design features not usually associated with the indigenous Japanese kimono. An historical and contextual analysis has demonstrated that the kimono has proven itself to be a highly esteemed fashion garment and its consumption over time and across space has been crucial in establishing a rich brocade of meanings that resonate in the kimono jacket. And yet, an article from *Vogue* online reflecting on the trend states:

The kimono has come full circle. Once an everyday garment, over time, the piece became a ceremonial one –it's the traditional dress of Japan. But these days celebrities like Rihanna and Elizabeth Olsen, not to mention myriad festival girls, are

taking a reimagined version of this age-old robe and transforming it into a modern wardrobe staple (Borrelli-Persson 2015).

As my article has strived to demonstrate, and as the *Vogue* correspondent seems worryingly ignorant, while the kimono is indeed the national dress of Japan, it has certainly never been a static garment biding its time until re-imagined in the ‘West’. The examples given in this paper through to the 2010’s, should not be viewed as isolated reimaginings, but rather as affirmation of long-established intra- and transnational dialogues.

Fashion is a dynamic system that permits constant revision of cultural motifs, forms and meanings. The kimono jacket functioned as an ideal liminal space in which forms, materials and meaning were constantly recombined to communicate an artistic, unique, beautiful or even politically- or socially-conscious wearer. The kimono jacket became emblematic of the boho chic lifestyle in the early 2010’s, whose products were recognised by their exotic, eclectic, intricate, luxurious and draped features. Through the design and marketing of kimono jackets with such features, an illusion of expressive individuality was created because of the historical associations and high esteem held by the kimono.

Anne Hollander has stated that at the cinema, “Even if a curtain does not rise or part but only surrounds the action, the plenteous folds on either side indicate the presence of magic and myth, with the emotionally nourishing suggestion of luxury and excess” (Hollander 1993: 81). Like the curtain, the kimono jacket, characterised by ample fabric, encapsulates a realm of possibility in the dialogue between body and material. Its oversized nature means it can transform any outfit to which it is added, dressing it up or down. Through its physical properties and the associated meanings folded into the garment, the kimono jacket allows its wearer to transcend mundane experience and present herself as something unique and artistic, and I would argue that this feature has been essential to the fashionability of this garment.

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Figures

1. Boohoo Kimono advertisement posted in Central Station, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK (2015). Photograph by author.
2. Top row from left: Elevenes Jun Tassel Kimono purchased from Anthropologie, 2015; Emma Elephant Print Maxi Kimono purchased from boohoo.com 2015; Cocoon Wrap Kimono Jacket purchased from Free People, 2014; Sammy Raw Edge Kimono purchased from Free People, 2014; Sunfaded Kimono purchased from Free People, 2014. Bottom row from left: Plain Mid Length Kimono purchased from boohoo.com, 2015; Denise Kimono Style Bed Jacket purchased from Free People, 2014; Maize Long Cape purchased from Free People, 2014; ; Embroidered shirt purchased from Zara, 2018; Embroidered Jacquard Kimono purchased from Zara, 2018. Photograph by the author.
3. Table 1 and 2: Kimono ownership and use among respondents.
4. Table 3: What is 'kimono' about your garment?

5. Lena Yamaguchi in kimono jacket purchased at Zara in Tokyo, 2014. Photograph by permission of Allie Yamaguchi.
6. Elevenes Jun Tassel Kimono purchased from Anthropologie, 2015. Photograph by the author.
7. Denise kimono style bed jacket purchased from Free People, 2014. Photograph by the author.
8. Embroidered shirt purchased from Zara, 2018. Photograph by the author.
9. Helix Velvet Burnout Beaded Fringe Duster featured in Phraseology's Loft Life Collection lookbook, 2015.
10. Kimono jacket purchased from velvetcoscos, 2019. Photograph by the author.
11. Free People Cocoon Wrap Kimono Jacket, purchased from Free People, 2014. Photograph by the author.
12. Desert Rose Kimono by Pretty Attitude. By permission of Pretty Attitude (www.pretty-attitude.com).
13. Screen grab of Phraseology website homepage, 2016.
14. Screen grab of Ollie Kimono, Cleobella. Accessed 18 July 2019. <https://shop.cleobella.com/products/ollie-kimono?pos=19&sid=0458f34e6&ss=r&variant=11716107521>. By permission of Cleobella.

¹ These included Abercrombie and Fitch, Anthropologie, Free People, Gap, H&M, Hollister, Marks & Spencer, Miss Selfridge, Monsoon, River Island, Top Shop, Urban Outfitters, Cleobella, She Vamps and Phraseology.

² For example, see Eicher 1999; Paulicelli and Clark 2009; Jansen and Craik 2016.

³ For example, see Welters and Lillethun 2018; Cheang and Kramer 2017; Research Collective Decolonising Fashion at www.rcdfashion.com.

⁴ This exhibition was organised by the Kyoto Costume Institute and was exhibited at the National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto (1994); Musée de la Mode et du Costume, Paris (1996); TFT Hall, Tokyo (1996); Los Angeles County Museum of Art (1998); Brooklyn Museum of Art (1998-99); Museum of New Zealand, Wellington (2003); Christchurch Art Gallery (2003-4).

⁵ *Refashioning Kimono* was co-organized by the Kyoto Costume Institute and the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco and appeared at Newark Museum (13 October 2018-6 January 2019), Asian Art Museum of San Francisco (8 February-5 May 2019) and Cincinnati Art Museum (28 June-15 September 2019).

⁶ This exhibition was organised by the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, opening 29 February 2020.

⁷ See for example Rakuten Global Market at <http://global.rakuten.com/en/> and Kimono Flea Market Ichiroyan at <http://www.ichiroya.com/> as well as *Nanao* editors 2011; Okazaki 2015; and Cliffe 2017.

⁸ See Kramer 2013: 14-15.

⁹ See Kramer 2009 for a discussion of the meanings of Japanese textiles, including kimono in Victorian British homes.

¹⁰ Phraseology is now defunct.

¹¹ These include the Free People Cocoon Jacket, Free People Sammy Raw Edge Kimono, Maize Long Cape, and Jun Tassel Kimono (see figure 2).

¹² See New Look Group 2015 for statistics.