
Landscapes in Kimono Design during the Early Showa Period

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abstract

The influence of Western culture started to spread in Japan in Taisho and the early Showa periods. This paper focuses on the novel "Western-style landscape" kimono patterns, which were created during this era. Landscape is one of the traditional kimono patterns. But these patterns got enriched with the introduction of Western techniques, culture and imageries. The Western-style landscape-pattern kimonos are categorized by characteristics. This includes mountain patterns among other novel landscapes. Traditionally, mountains, especially Mt. Fuji, represent good luck. However, this novel mountain is not an object of faith. The mountains drawn as patterns or the "mountainscape" were discovered as a sightseeing area during that era, for example, the Japanese Alps. Some of these mountains are depicted to be together with Melchior-like elements, such as castles and flower fields. These mountain patterns are similar to new creations influenced by the Western culture, but these can also be positioned in a traditional context of kimono patterns.

Introduction

During the Taisho and the early Showa periods, ordinary people began to be influenced by the Western culture, and their lives began to become westernized. Accordingly, new versions of kimono designs were created. Inui discovered war-pattern kimonos in a novel patterns, which were interesting ones often used in unseen parts such as *juban* (襦袢 undershirt for kimono) and *haura* (羽裏 back of kimono coat). These designs were strongly influenced by Western culture. Usually, it is difficult to determine the exact age of a kimono pattern from its design, but now, the production age can be identified according to the presentation of the patterns, such an inclusion of planes and battleships. On the one hand, Inui pointed out that such war-pattern kimonos were considered auspicious during

that era.¹⁾ On the other hand, Aoki analyzed the prospectus and standard designs of the Takashimaya-hyakusenkaï (高島屋百選会) and revealed the changes in the designs of kimonos. She also pointed out that new kimono designs were developed by incorporating European art trends.²⁾ Under such circumstances, kimonos with new patterns of landscape appeared.

1. Landscape patterns

1.1. Types of Landscape-Pattern Kimonos

There were several types of landscape-pattern kimonos; some of these had existed before the early modern times. One example is the Goshodokimonyou, which was used by the bride of a samurai. Famous places are also a subject of traditional

landscape patterns. Among them are *Omi-hakkei*, which depicts the scenery around Lake Biwa imitating *Shosho-hakkei* (瀟湘八景, *The Eight Views of Xiaoxiang*) from the themes of Chinese paintings. There were kimono patterns based on *Tokaido-gojusantugi* (東海道五十三次) in the Edo period. Mt. Fuji was often used as an inspiration on kimono patterns (see figure 1).



Figure 1. Mount Fuji pattern (Private Collection)

On the other hand, novel Western-style landscape kimono patterns appeared in the modern era. One pattern type is a drawing of a city landscape; this type celebrates the introduction of new technology. Another is a drawing of a tourist resort. Mountains and lakes are also drawn on kimonos (see figure 2). Some of these kimonos with deformed landscapes would depict fantasy landscapes.

Among these novel Western-style landscape kimono patterns, the present paper focuses on mountain landscape. There are three reasons. First, kimonos with mountain patterns were often used on formal occasions, and new patterns are used for casual wear as on *haura* or *juban*. This is because the latter is not a traditional pattern and is considered informal; thus, people used these new patterns for leisurely activities. Second, some mountain patterns are drawn with a new technique that was influenced by the West. Third, mountain patterns reflect the changes in the meaning of travel in the old era.

I found two categories in mountain patterns of kimonos. One category has drawing of mountains and skiers (see figure 3).



Figure 2. Mountainscape and flower garden kimono³⁾



Figure 3. Mountainscape and skiers kimono⁴⁾

The other category has drawing of mountains and flower garden (see figure 2). The mountains in these categories are different from the traditional patterns of Mt. Fuji. From the technical point of view, kimonos studied in this paper were worn by upper class people.

I have studied the new mountain patterns of kimonos by comparing them with Mt. Fuji, which had been drawn traditionally, to show how the meaning of mountains changed among Japanese people and how such changes were reflected in kimono patterns' creation.

1.2. People's Views of Mountains

First, it was considered how mountains were viewed by people during the Taisho and early Showa periods. People's views of travel had changed dramatically during this time. Akai analyzed the travel trends as recorded by the Japan Tourist Bureau and discussed the development of the Japanese travel culture, including the actual conditions of the mountain climbing boom. He argued that the traditional Japanese people traveled with village communities for religious reasons. However, these village communities were dissolved with the birth of "travel groups" and "mountain climbing groups" in large cities. For these new groups, mountain climbing was an enjoyable activity, and this became the purpose of going to the mountains. He discussed the change in the purpose of going to mountains; the religious intention became just one of the various reasons for going to the mountains. In particular, he pointed out, mountain climbing boom led to a new travel trend.⁵⁾

In this context, mountain climbing to the Japanese Alps became popular in those days. In 1921, the Japanese created an information center and provided guide booklets. They also ensured the availability of railways and buses from different

areas to the Japanese Alps. In fact, the *Asahi Shimbun*, from 1879 to 1945, had written 294 articles mentioning the "Japanese Alps" in their headlines, and there were many headlines of "Japanese Alps" in the Taisho period. In those days, the Japanese Alps was discovered not only as a place of faith but also as a place of enjoyable excursion.

These people did not only climb the Alps for religious purposes but also found beauty in the form of mountains. Namio Ochiai's *Roman annai nanoka no tabi (The Journey of Seven Days)* published in 1916 introduced the mountain climbing route of the Japanese Alps.⁶⁾ The book noted that more children and women began to climb Mt. Fuji, and those who were not satisfied with Mt. Fuji began to climb the Japanese Alps. The book introduced the easiest and most pleasant routes to feel the atmosphere of the Japanese Alps. The book also focused on other mountains, especially Mt. Yarigatake. This book noted a lot of practical things, such as the cost and time of mountain climbing.

The beauty of the mountains gathered a lot of attention in those days. An example is the many photo competitions organized by the *Asahi Shimbun*. The theme of a photo competition in 1922 was the Japanese Alps during summer. The Japanese Alps was considered as the ideal mountains, and they wanted to expand the field of art with it. There were 493 entries made to this photo competition. The Japanese Alps gathered people's attention as beautiful mountain ranges for the first time. The winners' photos were published on *the Asahi Shimbun*. The first prize photo is a picture of the ridgeline of the Alps. The second prize photo shows beautiful mountains with clouds. Later, people appreciated more the beauty of the Alps when its ridgeline was partially visible and when the Alps was partially hidden by the clouds. The third prize photo shows the view of the Alps from below. The photo includes trees in the foreground and the mountain

ranges in the distance. There were no people, huts, animals, or bridges shown.

The way in which these photos were taken is similar to the way the mountains were drawn on kimonos which depict a person's perception of the mountain. Traditionally, Mt. Fuji was drawn from the perspective of a person looking up at the mountain. By changing the viewpoint of seeing the mountain as a place of faith into a place for excursions, the relationship of the mountain and the artist became closer.

Mt. Fuji as a pattern has been described as good luck. There is a Japanese saying that in terms of good luck, "First Fuji, second hawk, third eggplant". On the other hand, the Japanese Alps was not considered to be good luck. It would be depicting ski activities, which was one of the popular activities at that time.

2. The Westernized and Fashionable Technique

The technique can be realized to be Western and fashionable to these people in the old era. This technique is called Musen-yuzen, Ekigaki-yuzen, or Nuregaki-yuzen. Normal yuzen technique uses a preliminary sketch. The craftsman would trace the initial sketch with glue and paint inside of the glued outline. Therefore, a white line (*itome*) remains between the outline of the pattern and the background color, and so the color would not bleed. Owing to this, the impression would be flat as in a coloring book.

On the other hand, Musen-yuzen would apply rubber liquid to the cloth and draw a pattern with a brush before it dries. Sometimes, the artist would draw a simple sketch and draw the pattern directly on the cloth so there are no lines. Artisans have a brush with color and a brush with only water. After applying the color, the artisans spread the color with

the water brush. Therefore, Musen-yuzen makes it possible to mark brushstrokes and dye gradation, resulting in realistic oil paintings like kimono drawing.

This technique was fully realized around 1897, when synthetic dyes became popular in Japan. However, the Musen-yuzen technique became popular only in the late Taisho period. According to *Zouho kyozome no hiketsu (The Secrets of Kyoto Dye)*, originally, artists using the Musen-yuzen had to make rubber liquid by themselves, but new entries were easier because rubber liquid became commercially available from around 1920.⁷⁾ In other words, this technique itself made people feel novel.

Conclusion

I want to focus on one example, which clearly depicts the Matterhorn (see figure 4).



Figure 4. Matterhorn kimono coat⁸⁾

First, the name "Japanese Alps" came from the Alps in Europe because the mountainous landscape with many rock peaks and snowy valleys looked similar. This similar naming suggests the aspirations of people at that time regarding their interests in the European Alps and the West.

Yūkō Maki was the first Japanese to succeed

in climbing Eiger of the Alps in 1921. Akai says that this news became a decisive contribution to spread mountain climbing among Japanese people.⁹⁾ Furthermore, in 1922, Takeharu Aso succeeded in climbing the Matterhorn. In 1923, he climbed Mt. Yarigatake with skis for the first time in the winter. In addition, there is a kimono pattern with a castle and white bird flying over the Alps (see figure 5).



Figure 5. Mountainscape and castle kimono¹⁰⁾

Such a bird and castle, of course, were added as decoration. Although the specific image source is unknown, this bird or castle seems to be inspired by a European fairy tale. In fact, Nakura explains European fairy tales were introduced with sophisticated illustrations during the Taisho period.¹¹⁾

This fact shows that people at that time certainly enjoyed the beauty of the Japanese Alps. Moreover, in my opinion, they had the European Alps in their minds. In other words, these mountain patterns reminded the Japanese people of both the European Alps and the Japanese Alps. This is a kind of “mitate”, which shows one thing while implying

another image of the origin.

In conclusion, these mountain patterns resemble a new creation under the influence of the West, but it can also be positioned in a traditional context of kimono patterns. Mountain patterns show the Japanese people’s aspiration toward the natural mountain landscape of the West and new cultural activities like mountain climbing in a unique manner.

Notes

- 1) Inui, Y. (2007). *Kimonogara ni miru sensou*. Tokyo: Impact Shuppankai.
- 2) Aoki, M. (2009). Taisho Shouwashoki no kimonozugara ni mirareru Yoroppa no geijutsushichou no eikyou. *Kobe Fashion Zoukei Daigaku/Kobe Fashion Zoukei Tankidaigakubu Kenyuukiyou*, 33, 1-15
- 3) Ikeda, S. (1995). *Nihon no oshare: onna no kimono, otoko no kimono, kodomo no kimono*. Tokyo: Nikkei, Unknown page number.
- 4) Tanaka, Y. (2015) *Modan to sui o tanoshimu: Tanaka Yoku no antiku kimono korekushon*. Kyoto: Tankosha, p. 22.
- 5) Akai, S. (2016). *Ryokou no modanizumu: Taisho Showazenki no shakaibunkahendou*. Kyoto: Nakanishiya Shuppan.
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- 7) Takahashi, N. (1934) *Zouho kyozone no hiketsu*. Kyoto: Kyoto Shoin, pp. 491-492.
- 8) Author Unknown, (2001) *Kotto o tanoshimu 38: Mukashi kimono to asobu*, Tokyo: Heibonsha, p. 118.
- 9) Akai, S. (2016). *Ryokou no modanizumu: Taisho Showazenki no shakaibunkahendou*. Kyoto: Nakanishiya Shuppan, p. 61.
- 10) Tanaka, Y. (2015) *Modan to sui o tanoshimu: Tanaka Yoku no antiku kimono korekushon*. Kyoto: Tankosha, p. 20.
- 11) Nakura, Y. (2005). *Nihon no kindai to Gurimudouwa: jidai ni yoru henka o yomitoku*. Kyoto: Sekaishisoshu.

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