

PRESS RELEASE

New publication: "The Kimono: The Soul of Japanese Fashion and Identity – Japan's Textile Art History"

A fascinating insight into the cultural and historical significance of the kimono as a Japanese cultural asset and its evolution through the centuries.

With "The Kimono: The Soul of Japanese Fashion and Identity – Japan's Textile Art History," a comprehensive work has finally been published that illuminates the profound cultural significance of the kimono as a symbol of Japanese tradition and identity. The book presents an in-depth analysis of the historical development of the kimono, its artistic aspects, and its role in changing Japanese society.

In the current globalization, traditional and national forms of clothing are increasingly being pushed into the background. This work provides a profound understanding of the complexity of the kimono as a cultural heritage of Japan. It is not just a garment, but a bearer of centuries-old traditions, craftsmanship, and social codes.

The author Hermann Candahashi combines art historical perspectives with cultural studies analyses, creating a standard work of great value for Japanologists and fashion historians, as well as for readers interested in culture. The book examines the kimono as a medium for Japanese identity formation and demonstrates how it has served as a mirror of social change over the centuries.

"The kimono embodies more than just a garment—it is an archive of cultural memories and a living testament to Japanese aesthetics," explains the author. "In my book, I wanted not only to trace the historical evolution of the kimono, but also to understand its deep roots in the Japanese psyche."

The work is divided into various thematic sections that offer a chronological overview of the development of the kimono from early Japan to the present day. Particular emphasis is placed on the Edo period, when the kimono took on its most iconic forms, and the Meiji Restoration, when Western influences challenged Japan's traditional dress culture.

The author meticulously analyzes the artisanal techniques used in the production of the kimono – from silk harvesting to various dyeing methods such as yuzen and shibori to the highly complex weaving techniques. Furthermore, the book unpacks the symbolic meanings of motifs and color combinations, often hidden from Western observers.

A special focus is placed on the transformation of the kimono in modern Japanese society and its reinterpretation by contemporary designers. The book discusses the tension between tradition and innovation, as well as efforts to preserve this unique cultural asset for future generations.

This publication contains numerous historical and contemporary images documenting the visual splendor and stylistic diversity of the kimono. The work is complemented by interviews with kimono artisans, collectors, and designers who provide personal insights into their relationship to this extraordinary garment.

About the Content

The book begins with a comprehensive historical context for the kimono, whose origins date back to the Heian period (794–1185). The author traces the evolution of this garment, which developed from Chinese influences and became a distinct Japanese form of expression over the centuries. Particularly insightful is the depiction of how the kimono transformed from a practical everyday garment into a sophisticated status symbol that reflected social hierarchies, regional affiliations, and seasonal contexts.

In his analysis of the Edo period (1603–1868), the author shows how the kimono experienced its cultural heyday. The strict social stratification of the Tokugawa era led to an elaborate system of dress codes in which each class and professional group developed its own styles. At the same time, kimono art experienced a creative zenith, as wealthy merchants, barred from political office, flaunted their wealth and taste through luxurious clothing. The depiction of the thriving pleasure districts of Edo (present-day Tokyo) and Kyoto and their significance for kimono fashion offers fascinating cultural and historical insights.

Another chapter is devoted to the critical period of the Meiji Restoration (1868-1912), when Japan opened up to the West after centuries of isolation. The author insightfully analyzes the identity crisis that arose when Western clothing was declared the official norm and the kimono suddenly became a symbol of "backwardness."

The efforts of the Japanese elite to strike a balance between modernization and cultural independence are traced using the example of clothing reforms.

The examination of the kimono as an art form is particularly in-depth. The author illuminates the various craft techniques in their historical development – from the Kasuri Ikat weaving method and the Yuzen reserve technique to gold and silver embroidery. Regional traditions of kimono-making are also presented, from the famous Nishijin weaving mills in Kyoto to the Bingata dyeing techniques of Okinawa. The symbolism of the motifs is explained in their cultural context – from seasonal plant depictions to literary allusions that are immediately recognizable to Japanese viewers.

A central concern of the book is to view the kimono not merely as a historical relic, but as a living part of Japanese culture. The author discusses the renaissance of the kimono in the post-war period, when it evolved from an everyday garment to a symbol of national identity and cultural distinctiveness. The connection between the kimono and traditional arts such as the tea ceremony, Noh theater, and calligraphy is explored, demonstrating how this garment is embedded in a complex system of aesthetic practices.

The book also addresses the challenges facing the kimono today. With the decline of traditional occasions for wearing the kimono, the craftsmanship involved in its production is also under threat. The author profiles master artisans fighting for the survival of their art and presents initiatives aimed at passing on knowledge of traditional techniques to younger generations.

A particularly innovative aspect of the book is its examination of how the kimono is received and transformed in contemporary fashion and pop culture. From the avant-garde designs of Issey Miyake and Yohji Yamamoto to manga and anime, the kimono remains a source of inspiration for creative expression. The author also analyzes the international reception of the kimono and the

complex debates about cultural appropriation that arise when Western designers adapt Japanese aesthetics.

As a whole, the book not only offers a comprehensive cultural history of the kimono, but also reflects fundamental questions about the meaning of tradition in a globalized world. It shows how a garment can become the focal point of cultural identity and the tensions that arise when tradition and modernity collide.

The idea for this book arose during an extended stay in Kyoto, where the author came into contact with traditional kimono makers. The personal encounters and conversations decisively shaped his understanding of the deeper meaning of the kimono.

"What fascinates me about kimono art is the combination of the highest craftsmanship precision with a symbolic language that is deeply rooted in the Japanese worldview," explains the author. "Every kimono tells a story – about the person who wears it, about the season, about cultural values. Deciphering this complex communication was one of the main goals of my book."

The author sees his work not only as a contribution to academic literature, but also as an attempt to preserve the cultural significance of the kimono for future generations. "At a time when traditional crafts are under pressure worldwide, it is important to understand and appreciate their significance for cultural identity," he emphasizes.

With "The Kimono: The Soul of Japanese Fashion and Identity," he presents a work that combines academic rigor with reader-friendly presentation, appealing to both experts and culturally interested laypeople.

The book raises a number of fundamental questions that go far beyond the mere description of a traditional garment:

How has the kimono shaped Japanese identity over the centuries, and how does it reflect social changes? The author examines how the kimono evolved from a functional everyday garment into a complex symbol of meaning, embodying social hierarchies, regional identities, and cultural values. Of particular interest is the analysis of how the kimono functioned as a symbol of cultural continuity and self-assertion in times of national crisis—for example, during Japan's forced opening in the 19th century or after World War II.

What interactions exist between the kimono and other forms of expression in Japanese culture? This book demonstrates how the kimono is embedded in a network of aesthetic practices that ranges from garden art to calligraphy and theater.

Instead of explicit representation and seasonal references – are worked out and explained in their philosophical context.

Can the kimono survive in the 21st century? This book examines efforts to make the kimono appealing to younger generations without sacrificing its cultural substance. Innovative concepts such as kimono sharing, simplified ways of wearing it, and its integration into contemporary fashion styles are presented and analyzed in terms of their cultural significance.

What role do gender relations play in kimono culture? The author illuminates how the kimono has both reinforced and subverted gender norms. The restrictive effect of the formal women's kimono is discussed, as is the subversion of gender roles in kabuki theater and contemporary fashion.

What can Western fashion history learn from the kimono? The author shows how the kimono offers alternative concepts to Western notions of fashion—from the timelessness of the design to the sustainability of the materials to the adaptability to different body shapes. The relevance of these concepts to current debates about slow fashion and sustainable textile production is explored.

By addressing these questions, the book succeeds in portraying the kimono not only as an aesthetic object, but as a multifaceted cultural phenomenon that provides insights into Japanese society and its values.

Reviews of the Book

"Sensitive analysis of the symbolic layers of meaning of the kimono."

"Precise contextualization of kimono art within the broader history of Japan."

"The author has developed a deep understanding of the technical and aesthetic principles of the kimono. His presentation of the various weaving and dyeing techniques is extremely accurate and conveys the complexity of these art forms even to non-experts."

"At a time when questions of cultural identity and appropriation are being intensely debated, this work offers a nuanced perspective that considers both the historical depth and contemporary transformations of the kimono. It exemplifies how traditions change and renew themselves without losing their substance."

"A fascinating exploration of a cultural symbol that is far more than a piece of clothing."

Relevance and Timeliness

The publication of this book comes at a time when interest in traditional crafts and authentic cultural expressions is growing worldwide. Given the uniformity of globalized mass production, there is a growing appreciation for garments that tell a story and embody a cultural identity. At the same time, the way we deal with the cultural traditions of other societies is being critically discussed. The book provides a sound foundation for this debate by illuminating the complex historical, social, and aesthetic dimensions of the kimono, thus contributing to a respectful intercultural dialogue.

Finally, the book is of interest to all those interested in the dynamics of cultural identity formation. Using the kimono as an example, it shows how societies can preserve their traditions while simultaneously renewing them—a process that is of existential importance for many cultures in our globalized world.

About the Author

The author is an expert on Japanese culture and religion, known for his books, and has published numerous articles on these topics. He spent several years, with interruptions, in Japan, where he intensified his knowledge in various places and cities. His field research took him to numerous regions of Japan, from Hokkaido to Okinawa, and gave him deep insights into local traditions and customs. In addition to his travels, he also sees himself as a cultural mediator and has authored numerous books on Japanese spirituality and folklore. He is particularly interested in the connection between traditional ideas and modern society, as well as the intercultural dialogue between Japan and Western cultures.

Availability

"The Kimono: The Soul of Japanese Fashion and Identity – Japan's Textile Art History" is now available in three languages ??(German, English, and French) in bookstores, as a hardcover, paperback, e-book, and audiobook. Further information, excerpts, and event information can be found on the publisher's website.

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THE KIMONO: THE SOUL OF JAPANESE FASHION AND IDENTITY

A Journey through Japan's Textile
Art History



Hermann Candahashi

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