

論文

Experiencing Japanese Kimono: Costumes of the Japanese-Themed Performances in the West End Theatres 1885-1905

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Introduction

This paper explores the kimonos that were used as costumes in British-made Japanese performances in the West End theatre district of London, from 1885 to 1905, with a particular focus on *The Mikado* (1885 and 1895), *The Geisha* (1896) and *The White Chrysanthemum* (1905). An analysis of the costumes used in these performances reveals the different transformations evoked by kimonos. The kimono on stage was not just presented as an object to be collected or looked at, it also functioned as an experience that could transform western bodies and minds, and that changed depending on the degree to which kimonos had been adopted in contemporary British fashion.

Japanese-themed performances are often discussed within studies of Japonisme in British theatres. Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado* (1885) was one of the earliest Japanese-themed performances to receive great acclaim when it first opened at the Savoy Theatre in London. Ryota Kanayama regards *The Mikado* as a 'virtual reality' that was not even a 'parody' of Japan but was completely made up in Britain.¹ Likewise, *The Mikado*'s story line itself was Britain's response to Japan and the wider world, as the production was deeply influenced by the political stance of the British Empire.² Noboru Koyama also discusses the Japanese-themed performances in 1885 in his study of Japanese entertainment in the West and states how some Japanese people who came to London to take part in the Japanese Native Village exhibition (which also opened in London in 1885), helped with the

production of *The Mikado*.³ These significant studies reveal that Japanese-themed performances from 1885 onwards played a key role in developing Japonisme from ‘collecting habits’ into popular entertainments.

Josephine Lee studied *The Mikado* and its reception in America and she argues that the objectification of the characters of *The Mikado* made Japonisme familiar to the British and American middle-class household by suggesting that ‘characters resemble the docile objects of the parlor and dining room.’⁴ Here, Lee associates *The Mikado* with Japonisme in decorative art and interior design. The costumes are not evaluated as ‘clothing’ that was in an intimate relationship with Western bodies. By contrast, fashion historians, Elizabeth Kramer and Akiko Savas, see Japanese-themed performances from the costume point of view in the catalogue for *Kimono: Kyoto to Catwalk*, an exhibition held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2020. They describe how *The Mikado* and *The Geisha* ‘brought a vision of “exotic” Japan to a wider audience.’⁵ A more detailed analysis of each costume in Japanese-themed performances was conducted by Yukiko Komeima and Kei Sasai in 2012. They concluded that the design, colour and patterns of the kimonos in *The Mikado* and *The Geisha* played an important role in portraying each character and narrating the story.⁶ While Komeima and Sasai focus on the design of the costumes, the analysis of the transformations experienced on stage is left unstudied.

This paper explores the relationship between kimonos and their wearers, seeking to show how body and garment interact with one another. The three performances discussed in this paper played an important role in suggesting and reflecting how kimonos were understood among upper and upper-middle class society. The process of transforming British bodies became easier and easier, as the kimono became more familiar in Britain.

1. *The Mikado*

Kimonos as a Foreign Experience

The first Japanese-themed musical comedy performed in Britain was

The Mikado. It opened in 1885, which was one of the most remarkable years for Anglo-Japanese cultural history. The Japanese Native Village opened in Knightsbridge, London, in January of that year and displayed Japanese tea houses, temples and various forms of entertainment.⁷ Two months later, on 14 March 1885, *The Mikado* was first performed at the Savoy Theatre in London. Josephine Lee writes that ‘*The Mikado* served as the basis of knowledge of what “Japanese” meant.’⁸ It was not simply a fragmentary scene, but encapsulated the whole idea of ‘Japan’ as seen by the British mind at the time. What the visitors of the Japanese Native Village and the audiences of *The Mikado* saw was kimonos ‘in motion.’ They were amongst the first ‘live’ displays of Japonisme in Britain.

While *The Mikado* was set in the fictional Japanese town of Titipu, all the Japanese characters were played by white actors and actresses. The story begins with Nanki-Poo, son of the Mikado of Japan, fleeing to escape his marriage to an elderly woman, Katisha, by disguising himself as a travelling musician. Nanki-Poo meets and falls in love with Yum-Yum, who is engaged to Ko-Ko, the Lord High Executioner of Titipu. The Mikado is concerned that there have been no recent executions in Titipu and threatens Ko-Ko with a beheading of his own unless he can find a substitute to be executed. Ko-Ko finds Nanki-Poo, who is preparing to commit suicide in despair over losing Yum-Yum, and makes a bargain with him. Nanki-Poo can marry Yum-Yum for a month if he allows himself to be executed at the end of his allotted time. In Act II, the Mikado and Katisha arrive in Titipu. Ko-Ko hands them a fake death certificate and Katisha discovers that it belongs to Nanki-Poo. The Mikado declares that he will execute all who are responsible for the death of his son. To avoid the tragedy, Nanki-Poo persuades Ko-Ko to marry Katisha, who initially rebuffs Ko-Ko but is soon moved by his love song. The Mikado is astonished to find his son is alive, but Ko-Ko’s absurd explanation is deemed satisfactory. The musical concludes with everyone in Titipu celebrating the happy ending.

The people who were associated with the construction of the Japanese

Native Village helped with the production of *The Mikado*.⁹ According to Richard D'Oyly Carte's interview published in the *Pal Mall Gazette* in September 1885, Gilbert asked a Japanese dancing master and two Japanese girls to teach him 'all they knew' during the process of creating the opera. Carte stated that they 'acquired the Japanese wriggle and the Japanese giggle and other commodities of an equally fragile but desirable nature.'¹¹ A Japanese visitor who saw *The Mikado* when it travelled to New York confirmed that the actresses in *The Mikado* 'would hardly [be] distinguishable from the ladies of my [his] own country,'¹² the production also imported the Japanese bodily movements. The costume design was by the famous designer, William Charles Pitcher (1858-1925). He was well-known as 'Wilhelm' in London.¹³ The actual making was done by the London-based costumier, Madame León.¹⁴ In his interview, Carte revealed how the costumes of *The Mikado* were put together, stating that he 'bought up in London and Paris everything that was worth having.'¹⁵ He probably meant the second-hand clothes and textiles imported from Japan that had been sold in curio shops in London and Paris since the 1870s. Carte also explained that some of the costumes were too old to be used for his production, so he 'cut off the elaborate embroideries and had them put on brand-new grounds by appliqué work.'¹⁶ Fukai and Sasai write that the materials from a London-based department store called Liberty's were used for the costumes of *The Mikado*,¹⁷ and pieces of second-hand Japanese kimonos were probably appliquéd on Liberty's fabrics to complete each costume. Although there are not many sources to study the costumes of the first production in 1885, the photographs of the first revival of *The Mikado* played at the Savoy Theatre in November 1895, give a more comprehensive view of these patchworks. A weekly high society journal, *The Sketch*, featured this revival for two weeks in a row on 8 and 15 January 1896, in which quite a number of photographs of the actors and actresses were reproduced. It is unknown if they also used the costumes from the first production. The costumes in the photographs seem to be a mishmash of varied materials. For example, the three little maids' costumes look very

close to real Japanese kimonos but they are mismatched, implying their costumes were separately chosen from the random things acquired in Paris and London.¹⁸(Figure 1) Also, the costume of an elderly lady, Katisha, has a distinctively hybrid style. (Figure 2) Unlike the other female characters' kimonos, Katisha's kimono is greatly altered from the original kimono form, having two-layers of garments with the top-kimono opened in front to show the skirt-like underkimono. This open-front style probably came from the tea-gown trend that had been fashionable in Britain since the late 1870s, and this will be discussed at length in the following section. It was possibly made up from two different materials, because the outer kimono has completely different embroidery from the inner kimono. The costumes of the male characters, too, clearly show the appliquéd parts on their costumes.



Figure 1: *The Sketch* (15 January, 1896): 615.



Figure 2: *The Sketch* (8 January, 1896): 565.

The kimono worn by Ko-Ko, for example, has rounded motifs placed onto the hem of his brocaded kimono. The same brocaded fabric was also used for the costume of Poo-Bah. Therefore, *The Mikado* demonstrates the hybrid

nature of Japonisme with the western actors and actresses acting and dancing in ‘Japanese-way’ while they were all dressed up in the costumes which were patchworked in an appropriative manner. When the second-hand kimonos and textiles were brought from Japan to Britain from the 1860s onwards, they had been used and collected as decorative objects, as if they were completely separated from the human body. In *The Mikado*, on the other hand, those empty kimonos from Japan were cut into pieces and put together to be brought back to life by the actors and the actresses who played a ‘Japanese’ by mimicking the behaviours they had learnt from ‘real’ Japanese people.

Kimonos were presented as an experience in *The Mikado*. Combined with the movements, kimonos that had been seen as objects could finally build a more tactile and intimate relationship with human bodies. Nevertheless, it also needs to be pointed out that this ‘experience’ was a completely foreign one for the British people. Wrapped in hybrid kimonos which were neither fully Japanese nor British, they moved and posed in a ‘Japanese’ way as they were instructed. Here, kimonos on stage were not objects to be collected or looked at, but were a foreign experience. A British body was thoroughly transformed into a foreign one by being encased in an entirely alien costume.

2. *The Geisha*

Fashionable Kimonos

In April 1896, only a few months after the first revival of *The Mikado*, another British-made Japanese-themed musical comedy, *The Geisha: A Story of a Tea House*, opened at Daly’s Theatre in London. It was produced by George Edwardes (1855-1915), and the production ran for 760 performances.

The Geisha is set in Japan and concerns Lieutenant Reginald ‘Reggie’ Fairfax of the British Royal Navy. Reggie spends his time at the Tea House of Ten Thousand Joys, where he meets many beautiful geishas, including O Mimosa San, the chief geisha of the tea house. Molly Seamore, who is engaged to Reggie, hears that her fiancé is infatuated with O Mimosa San and decides to follow him to Japan to win him back. Disguising herself as

a new geisha, named Roli Poli, Molly is inadvertently put up for sale along with other geishas after a local overlord closes the tea house in a jealous rage. The overlord, called Marquis Imari, tries but fails to buy O Mimosa San for himself at the sale, but instead purchases Molly disguised as Roli Poli. On the wedding day of Marquis Imari and Molly, O Mimosa San covertly switches a veiled Molly with a veiled French girl, called Juliette, who is secretly in love with Marquis Imari. The performance concludes with Juliette and Marquis Imari, O Mimosa San and her lover Katana and, lastly, Molly and Reggie all getting married and having a happy ending.

The female costumes in *The Geisha* were slightly less ‘costume-y’ and rather more fashion-focused compared to the ones in *The Mikado*. O Mimosa San was played by Marie Tempest (1864-1942), who was one of the most successful singers and actresses of her era. One of her costumes was described in an issue of *The Sketch* on 29 April 1896, as:

[her costume is] a Japanese dress of softest grey, lined with vividly beautiful blue, and all embroidered with pink and blue and white flowers, with white butterflies hovering over them, and long-legged birds with scarlet and white plumage poised gravely here and there.¹⁹

O Mimosa San’s kimono for the final scene was also described in detail as ‘the black ground almost covered with an embroidery of green and red flowers wrought with gold and silver, while a lining of vivid red gives added effect.’²⁰ No descriptions have been found explaining how and where these kimonos were made, except for *The Illustrated London News* which reported that all of the kimonos were ‘made in Japan.’²¹ The photographs of Tempest in these grey and black kimonos are reproduced in an issue from 20 May 1896. In one of them, Tempest as O Mimosa San is photographed riding a bicycle in one of her portraits. (Figure 3) There seems to be no attempt to mimic and replicate Japanese geisha in this photograph. Instead, it shows Tempest in her most attractive and entertaining manner. Another kimono

was also described in an article published in August 1896 as being made out of a pair of curtains in shimmering yellow with embroidered apple blossoms in pale-pink and white.²² According to the article, they were looking for kimonos in yellow (Tempest's favourite colour), only to find that it was unobtainable in Japan. But the problem was solved by the 'transformation of the curtains.'²³ It seems that Tempest, who was called 'a barbarian in her love of bright colours,' was quite particular about what she wore. The example of her yellow kimono implies that the stage costumes of highly successful actresses like Tempest could involve her opinions and preferences. The colour of one of her kimonos was personally selected from her own sense of fashion.



Figure3: *The Sketch* (20 May, 1896): 139.



Figure4: *The Sketch* (13 May, 1896): 99.

Letty Lind (1861-1923), who played Molly Seamore, first came on stage in a yachting dress by 'Maison Jay,'²⁴ which was one of the most fashionable fashion houses in Regent Street, London. The kimono she wore, when Molly disguises herself as a geisha, was described in *The Sketch* as 'a white satin robe exquisitely embroidered with pink-petalled flowers, tender-green leaves, and



Figure 5: *The Sketch* (13 May, 1896):99.

stately silver-plumaged birds, her dancing revealing a lining of pale blue and a transparent under-dress of white gauze.’²⁵ Figure 4 most likely depicts the kimono described above. The photograph portrays the scene in which she dances as Roli Poli. On the same page, there is another photograph of her in the same kimono but without her ‘Japanesy’ wig, which reminded the reader that Roli Poli was her alter ego, but not her true self. (Figure 5)

In the photographs of Tempest and Lind in their kimonos reproduced in *The Sketch*, their poses do not intend to look authentically ‘Japanese,’ but to be an attractive parody of Japan. In addition, the way women’s journals explained and described the costumes of *The Geisha* was different to the way they described the costumes of *The Mikado*, both in 1885 and 1895, especially with regard to how kimonos were incorporated within the contemporary fashions of the time. Because there were many ‘western’ characters who were dressed in fashionable dresses, as well as Japanese geishas in beautiful kimonos in *The Geisha*, kimonos were also included in the Victorian ‘fashionable’ category rather than being disregarded as ‘foreign,’ in fact, *The Illustrated London News* reported that ‘[t]he fashionable tea-gown of the future will surely be a Japanese Kimono with a lovely obi.’²⁶

Kimono Tea-Gown

The tea-gown trend had already been swirling in the Victorian fashion scene by 1896. According to Sasai, tea-gowns were first seen around the late 1870s, as a less-formal gown that was worn at the five o’clock tea

with families and friends. The new habit of welcoming guests at home for tea enjoyed by the people in upper and upper-middle classes helped the development of tea-gowns in contemporary fashion. The layered style with open-front gown was one of the typical styles of tea-gowns. It was originally designed as a more comfortable garment in the 1870s, but they became more and more elaborate and fitted. According to Ashelford, tea-gowns became very elaborate and ‘could be worn as an informal dinner dress’ by the end of the 1880s.²⁷ One of the most expensive and famous fashion designers of the Victorian period, Charles Frederick Worth (1825-1895) even designed highly luxurious tea-gowns.

It was also loved by aesthetes and a lot of Aesthetic-inspired tea-gowns were available from the 1880s.²⁸ Interestingly, Japanese-inspired tea-gowns were seen in some high society journals as early as 1878,²⁹ but the ‘Japanese’ elements were often too modest to actually be spotted. Those Japanese-inspired tea-gowns from the late 1870s to the entire 1880s have a complete western dress form with tight bodice and bustle.³⁰ In 1892, the term ‘Kimino,’ possibly meaning ‘Kimono,’ was used to describe a particular design of tea-gown.³¹ The design looks slightly closer to a Japanese kimono in the sense that it is a one-piece with a straighter silhouette. Before 1896, kimono-shaped gowns or second-hand Japanese kimonos that had less-constructed silhouette were only enjoyed among the artistic groups, and rarely worn daily in most of the upper and upper-middle class households. It was later in the year of the opening of *The Geisha* at Daly’s when a kimono-shaped gown was introduced as a tea-gown. In 1896, the Liberty Christmas gift catalogue sold a kimono-shaped gown for the first time with an illustration that they called a ‘Japanese Kimono (or Native Dress).’ This kimono was described as being ‘[a]dmirably adapted for Tea Gowns and Fancy Costumes.’³³ While no direct connection between Liberty’s kimono and *The Geisha* has been found so far, it may not only be a coincidence that a garment shaped like a Japanese kimono started to be sold as tea-gowns from 1896. Indeed, the costumes worn by the actresses in *The Geisha* were connected to consumer culture at

the end of the Victorian period, and this is implied in the women's journals that introduced and featured the costumes in great detail. Furthermore, the *fin de siècle* catalysed the rise of musical comedies that could attract, and were accessible to, a broad audience.³⁴ The most noteworthy group amongst this audience were upper to middle class single women, 'for whom the stigma of attending the theatre had been removed.'³⁵ The performance itself, therefore, played the role of a fashion magazine, enchanting the female audience with the fashionable and wearable garments presented on stage. The fashionable costumes in *The Geisha* were interwoven with the tea-gown trend in Britain. The kimonos in *The Geisha* were not displayed as an alien and foreign 'costume' but more as personal garments that would feel more familiar to a British audience.

On-Stage Kimono Experience

In the story of *The Geisha*, kimono was personally experienced by an English character through the process of 'disguising.' Since there were no 'English' characters who dressed in a kimono in *The Mikado*, Molly was probably the first character who wore a kimono as an English person on stage. The sale of the indentured geishas during the last scene of Act I was a key event which brings up the discussion of what this 'disguise' signifies in the story. Molly Seamore dressed herself in a kimono and transformed into a new geisha, Roli Poli, in order to 'win Reggie back.' At the sale, there is a binary opposition between who 'buys' and who 'is bought.' In the last scene of Act I, Lady Constance Wynne, an English aristocrat who travels to Japan in her yacht, buys O Mimosa San to save her from Marquis Imari at the sale. She holds the power to 'buy' geishas in the story. Lady Constance's character is most likely inspired by British female travellers. Anna Brassey (1839-1887), the wife of British Liberal Party politician Thomas Brassey, who travelled the world with her husband in their yacht. They visited Japan in 1877. Isabella Bird (1831-1904), one of the most famous British female travellers, also visited Japan in 1878. Lady Constance is characterised as an extraordinary

woman with financial and social power. Molly Seamore, on the other hand, is being sold to Marquis Imari because she is dressed as a geisha. She, as well as other Japanese geishas, are characterised as women who are destined to be owned by someone more powerful than them. The common view of Japanese women in Victorian Britain was that they were child-like, sensual and 'in need of Western guidance.'³⁶ The word 'geisha' had entered the English vocabulary in the 1870s, but it was this particular musical comedy that 'did the most to cement the image of the geisha in the West.'³⁷ As Downer explains, a song from the musical (also titled *The Geisha*) had lyrics that were 'distinctly saucy,' leading to 'the image of the geisha as a creature of deliciously dubious morals was established in the western mind.'³⁸ In *The Geisha*, the image of a Japanese geisha was suggested by adding the 'saucy' and immoral characteristics evident in the musical to the perception of Japanese women as child-like, sensual and in need of guidance.

In Act II, her alter ego, Roli Poli, is able to return to being 'Molly Seamore' with the help of O Mimosa San. As she escapes from Marquis Imari, Molly exclaims 'you [Marquis Imari] thought I'd marry a Japanese Marquis, when I can get an English sailor?' seeming as though she has a choice in the matter. Molly, who earlier found herself in a position where she was being sold, now speaks assuredly of her fate as she returns to being an English woman. In 1896, there was a great deal of discourse regarding a woman's social identity in Britain. The feminist ideal of the 'New Woman' emerged in the late 1890s, with the media being dominated by both discussion and criticism of the movement. Independence was the fundamental idea behind these 'New Women,' who demanded political, physical and sartorial changes that acknowledged their equality to men. The New Woman was the kind of woman who supported women's suffrage, had a job, behaved independently, played sports and rode a bicycle.³⁹ This was contrary to the Victorian feminine ideal that saw a woman as the 'Angel in the House.' As such, New Women were ridiculed by some for not meeting this ideal and admired by others for their convictions. Although there is

no discernible sign of Molly's affiliation to the movement, her coming to Japan by herself is certainly not the kind of behaviour one would expect of a Victorian 'Angel in the House.' The newly-established image of a modern English woman, which was influenced by the rise of New Women in late-Victorian society, helped to characterise Molly's role in *The Geisha*. Molly's 'modern' and therefore 'active' character is exemplified even further after she is revealed to not be a Japanese geisha. While Molly Seamore embodies the western image of a Japanese geisha when she is wearing a kimono, her characterisation as a modern young English woman is emphasised when she reveals her true identity. In *The Geisha*, Molly's fate is thus changed through the influence of a single Japanese kimono. In other words, kimono in *The Geisha* offers a personal experience to one English woman, that could alter her attitude and identity. Her social identity on stage is switched between a modern English woman and a passive Japanese woman through putting on and taking off a kimono.

3. *The White Chrysanthemum* Westernised Kimonos on Stage

In 1905, another Japanese-themed musical comedy opened at the Criterion Theatre. It was called *The White Chrysanthemum* and was written by Leedham Bantock (1870-1928) and Arthur Anderson (1873-1942). This fun and lyrical production opened on 31 August 1905 and ran for 179 performances until 10 February 1906. It is a love story about an English woman named Sybil Cunningham, who comes to Japan to follow her sweetheart, Lieutenant Reginald Armitage of the British Royal Navy. Reginald, called 'Reggie' for short, proposes to Sybil before leaving for Japan. Reggie initially goes to Japan for a 'promotion' so that his strong-willed father, an Admiral, might permit him to marry his beloved Sybil. Sybil follows Reggie and arrives in Japan chaperoned by Betty Kenyon, a young widow, and the two are given living quarters while Reggie awaits his promotion. While in Japan, Sybil puts on a kimono and pretends to be a 'Japanesy',⁴⁰ girl known as 'O San,' or



Figure 6: *The Play Pictorial* (1905): 140.

‘The White Chrysanthemum.’ She does this so that Reggie and herself can avoid getting into trouble with Reggie’s father. They are supported in their ruse by Reggie’s friend and fellow officer, Lieutenant Chippendale Belmont, while Reggie’s father finds another woman, Miss Cornelia Vanderdecken, a wealthy American heiress, for Reggie to marry. There are some ups and downs in the story but by the end, it concludes with three happy couples; Reggie and Sybil, Cornelia and Chippendale and, lastly, Betty and Reggie’s father.

The biggest difference between *The White Chrysanthemum* and other Japanese-themed performances is, quite obviously, the lack of male ‘Japanese’ characters, with

the exception of some rickshaw pullers. The male main characters are all English except for a Chinese servant called Sin Chong. Most of the men, including Reggie, are in naval uniforms that are clearly in contrast to those of the female characters, who wear flowing gowns with lots of frills, ribbons and colourful embroideries. Masculinities and femininities through costume design are strongly defined and exaggerated, with Japanese kimonos being emphasised as particularly feminine costumes.

Fashion is highly important in *The White Chrysanthemum*. The western-style dresses and the kimono-like gowns worn by Isabel Jay (1879-1927) who played Sybil/O San, and the six chorus girls who played Japanese girls, could all fit into the contemporary vogue in Britain. A kimono worn by Jay is one of the highlight pieces of this production. The cut of her kimono was moderated to meet contemporary western fashion with a low shoulder silhouette, a fluted skirt and train. (Figure 6) Jay loosely wraps her kimono so

Figure 7: *The Play Pictorial* (1905): 152.Figure 8: *The Play Pictorial* (1905): 142.

that her *décolletage* and round-shaped pendant are shown. As her kimono has a skirt-like silhouette, (similar to Katisha's kimono in *The Mikado*'s first revival), what she wears underneath is revealed as she moves. Likewise, the six 'Japanese' girls in the musical wear kimonos in the same manner and their matching underskirts, with embroideries, are on view as they dance. (Figure 7)

In one of the photographs featured in *The Play Pictorial*, Sybil even puts her kimono over her fashionable white dress. (Figure 8) In *The White Chrysanthemum*, Japanese kimonos were not considered as a garment that completed a look on its own, but as a gown to be flung on. Indeed, kimonos were rarely worn on their own when they were used as indoor gowns in Britain at around this period. Akiko Savas confirms



Figure 9: *Pall Mall Gazette*
(16 November, 1907): 10.

that indoor kimono gowns began to be sold at department stores from 1900.⁴¹ An article in *The Illustrated London News* from about ten years before suggesting that the kimonos in *The Geisha* would be the fashionable tea-gown of the future became reality in the early twentieth century.⁴² The term ‘kimono,’ ‘kimino’ or ‘kimona’ was widely used to describe Japanese kimonos, kimono-shaped gowns and kimono-inspired western dresses in Britain. Amongst them, kimono-shaped gowns were often used as indoor gowns by upper to middle class women in the early twentieth century.

When kimonos were worn at home, they were almost always worn over western dresses, as seen in an illustration in a fashion column from the *Pall Mall Gazette* on 16 November 1907. (Figure 9) During the 1900s, kimonos thus became recognised in Britain as a gown to be worn over a dress. Not only were the kimonos in *The White Chrysanthemum* identical in design to those sold in British stores as indoor gowns, but those kimonos were also worn in the way they would have been worn in British homes in 1905.

‘Open’ to ‘Conceal’

In an article from *The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, a critic wrote bitterly about the plot of *The White Chrysanthemum*. While the anonymous writer remarked that ‘[t]he play is beautifully mounted and delightfully dressed, and its costumes of east and west are in pleasing contrast,’⁴³ they expressed their disappointment at the story.⁴⁴ While the writer pointed out some of the parts they did not like, Sybil’s morality, above all, was the most contentious issue in the article. Sybil is chaperoned by a widow, Betty,

and stays with Reggie in Japan until his father allows him to marry her. The writer criticised Sybil for being in 'a position which is not conducive to sympathy',⁴⁵ because she 'apparently dwells in the same house',⁴⁶ with Reggie. The writer continued their argument by stating that 'the whole thing is most disagreeable for the heroine, who ought to have been married right off, or sent to a hotel.'⁴⁷ While some brave women were able to transcend social norms during the early twentieth century, Edwardian society inherited most of its strict morality from the former period. According to the criticism quoted above, Sybil's behaviour, such as dwelling in Reggie's house in Japan and disguising herself as a Japanese woman in order to deceive others, was far from that of a respectable woman. In the musical, however, Sybil could get away without suffering the devastating social consequences.

In the early twentieth century, there were numerous characteristics that had been ascribed to Japanese women in the West. Childishness and passiveness demonstrated by the Japanese women at the tea houses of the Japanese Native Village, the three little maids of *The Mikado* and the indentured geisha girls from *The Geisha* were the most commonly known portrayals of Japanese women.⁴⁸ After the success of *The Geisha* at Daly's in 1896, 'geisha' became the term to describe a typical Japanese woman. The term not only inherited the original image of Japanese women as childlike and passive, but they were also seen as a 'creature of deliciously dubious morals,' as quoted earlier. In *The White Chrysanthemum*, this fixed image of Japanese women inherited from *The Geisha* was projected onto the characters in kimonos. The six Japanese girls in the musical, for example, embody the typical idea of cute, dainty and slightly frivolous geisha girls. Figure 6 is titled 'A Little Bit of Fun While the Admiral's Away,' in which the six Japanese girls are carried off in the arms of British sailors. These girls were there to adorn the stage, but they also cemented 'the indelible image of the geisha in her kimono as a child-like creature, with little to offer than her body.'⁴⁹

In *The White Chrysanthemum*, the kimono plays an important role in transforming Sybil from an English lady to a Japanese woman, and vice-

versa. Upon arriving in Japan, Sybil transforms into O San by flinging on a kimono, which makes it possible for her to put herself in a situation that would normally be considered immoral if she had remained dressed as an English woman. Sybil uses a Japanese kimono to hide herself from her fiancé's father. She takes her kimono off when she is alone with her chaperon and her lover, Reggie. Kimonos in *The White Chrysanthemum* are all 'opened' revealing what is worn inside and constantly alluding to the motion of undressing the gown. Kimonos were presented as an open integument, which fully covered the British bodies but could easily be slipped off. Indeed, the image of childish, powerless and saucy Japanese geisha imposed on Japanese kimonos, could hide Sybil from the social norms she should have been facing, but it could also be slipped off more easily and freely. In the story of *The White Chrysanthemum*, the kimono is used as a cloak of invisibility.

In the final scene, Sybil dresses in a beautiful dress made of white chiffon. Her fashionable dress reminds the audience that Sybil is a respectable English woman who is worthy of marrying Reggie. This is in great contrast to Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*, performed in London in July of the same year (1905), in which a Japanese woman who marries an American naval officer is betrayed and decides to kill herself in despair. In Sybil's case, the kimono could be cast off as she pleased, which reminds the audience that her body is not trapped in a Japanese kimono but is rather imprisoned in her white chiffon dress. British social norms and morality were upon her at all times, and kimonos only temporarily hid her from them.

Conclusion

The kimonos in *The Mikado*, *The Geisha* and *The White Chrysanthemum* were experienced by the performers on stage. Costumes on stage were not just objects to be looked at from the distance, but were in a more intimate relationship with the human body. *The Mikado* made a breakthrough in Britain for kimonos to be experienced rather than being collected as objects. Kimonos were seen 'live' with duplicated behaviours of Japanese people.

The costumes were made from bits and pieces of both Japanese and British materials. By being combined with British materials, kimono became closer to 'clothing' rather than 'object to be collected.' By being combined with certain attitudes and behaviours, the kimono turned into an extraordinary experience that offered a 'virtual reality' that did not actually exist anywhere in the world. The bodies that were fully costumed in alien clothes were all completely transformed into foreign ones.

In *The Geisha*, on the other hand, kimonos were not entirely separated from contemporary fashion. They were also more familiar to the audience because the tea-gown trends that often quoted Japanese designs were already acknowledged among fashion-conscious people. Not only were the kimonos of O Mimosa San and Molly selected because they were fashionable, they were also greeted with great enthusiasm by the female audience. Kimonos in *The Geisha* were very different from those of *The Mikado* in the way that they were not a 'foreign' experience but were to do with the audiences' everyday lives. Indeed, a kimono is very personally experienced by an English woman, Molly, in the story, when she discovers that how she is perceived by society is changed by simply wrapping herself in a kimono. The British idea of Japanese women is naturally imposed upon Molly while disguised, which she is unable to escape from without help.

Transformation through a kimono was done more easily and freely than ever before in *The White Chrysanthemum*, performed in 1905. Sybil also disguised herself as a Japanese by flinging on a kimono as Molly had done in *The Geisha*, but in Sybil's case, her transformation was done on stage several times. Furthermore, Sybil's kimono was, most of the time, open at the front, so that it played a role in temporarily hiding her, instead of imposing the British idea of Japan upon her. In *The White Chrysanthemum*, the image of a Japanese woman as it existed in British society was also attached to a kimono, but the openness of Sybil's kimono implied that it was always in the process of being taken off.

Kimonos as stage costumes altered their existence from a foreign

experience that transformed a whole stage, to a more personal experience that transformed the attitudes and identities of the individual, all of which was also deeply associated with the process of adopting kimonos in contemporary fashion. Western-style kimonos have evolved into a predominantly ‘open’ gown, always implying the ‘undressing’ process, which enabled easy and instant transformation.

Notes

* This paper was presented at the Victorian Studies Society of Japan’s 18th Conference (Japan Women’s University, 18 November 2018) and was later added and modified by the author. I am grateful to the audience for their comments.

- 1 Ryota Kanayama, 『サヴォイ・オペラへの招待 — サムライ・ゲイシャを生んだもの — 』 [*Invitation to the Savoy Theatre: What created Samurai and Geisha*] (Niigata: Niigata Nippo Jigyosha, 2010): p.48.
- 2 *Ibid.*, pp.44-45.
- 3 Noboru Koyama, 『ロンドン日本人村を作った男—謎の興行師タナカー・ブヒクロさん 1839-94』 [*The Man who Produced the Japan Village: a Showman of Mystery, Tannaker Buhicrosan 1839-94*] (Tokyo: Fujiwara Shoten, 2015): p.291.
- 4 Josephine Lee, *The Japan of Pure Invention: Gilbert and Sullivan’s The Mikado* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2010): p.19.
- 5 Elizabeth Kramer and Akiko Savas, ‘The Kimono Craze: from Exoticism to Fashionability,’ Anna Jackson, ed., *Kimono: Kyoto to Catwalk* (London: V&A Publishing, 2020): p.181.
- 6 Yukiko Komeima and Kei Sasai, 「19 世紀後半のイギリス演劇にみる日本の服飾」 [‘Japanese Costumes in British Musical Comedies in the Late 19th Century’], 『日本女子大学大学院紀要』 [*The Japan Women’s University Memoirs*] 18 (2012): pp.161-170.
- 7 Koyama, *op cit.*, p.218.
- 8 Lee, *op cit.*, p.viii.
- 9 Koyama, *op cit.*, p.291.
- 10 Anon, ‘An Interview with Mr. D’ Oylly Carte,’ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 7 September 1885: p.12.

- 11 *Ibid.*, p.12.
- 12 S. Takeda, 'A Japanese Criticism of the The Mikado,' *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 29 November 1885: p. 27.
- 13 'Wilhelm,' Victoria and Albert Museum [n.d].
- 14 A journal from the Bailiwick of Guernsey, *The Star*, reports *The Mikado* 's first arrival at Guernsey on 17 September 1885. An article wrote that the costumes were 'made up under the artistic eye of Madame León' from the designs provided by Wilhelm. Madame León 's name is also listed as a costumery of several Gilbert and Sullivan 's operas. See J. P. Wearing, *The London Stage 1890-1899: A Calendar of Productions, Performers, and Personnel*, The Second Edition (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014): p.186, 273, 337 and 415.
- 15 Anon, 'An Interview with Mr. D 'Oyly Carte,' p.12.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p.12.
- 17 Akiko Fukai, 『ジャポニスム・イン・ファッション ― 海を渡ったキモノ』 [*Japonisme in Fashion: Kimonos in Overseas*] (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1994): p.174. Kei Sasai, 『ヴィクトリアン・ダンディー・オスカー・ワイルドの服飾観と「新しい女」』 [*Victorian Dandy: Oscar Wilde and the 'New Woman'*] (Tokyo: Keisou Shobou, 2015): p.234.
- 18 Their obis, especially, are distinctively different. While Peep-Bo 's obi looks thin and stiff, the obis of Yum-Yum and Pitti-Sing look as though they were made from kimono fabric.
- 19 Anon, 'Dress at the Play,' *The Sketch*, 29 April 1896: p.42.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p.42.
- 21 Clement Scott, 'The Play Houses,' *The Illustrated London News*, 2 May 1896: p.572.
- 22 Florence, 'Celebrities 'Clothes,' *The Sketch*, 12 August 1896: p.126.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p.126.
- 24 Anon, 'Dress at the Play,' p.42.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p.42.
- 26 Scott, *op cit.*, p.572.
- 27 Jane Ashelford, *The Art of Dress: Clothes through History 1500-1914* (London: National Trust Books, 1996): p. 242.
- 28 Liberty were selling tea-gowns since 1881, which were sold at between four and six guineas. See Sasai, *op cit.*, p. 212. Ashelford, *op cit.*, p.242.
- 29 Sasai, *op cit.*, p.235.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p.235-238.

- 31 *Ibid.*, p.239.
- 32 Prior to 1896, American fashion journal, *The Delineator*, which also sold copies in Britain, introduced a paper pattern for a kimono-like gown in 1890 and Liberty introduced ‘Japanese Printed Cotton Crepe Gowns’ without an illustration in their catalogue published in 1892. However, in 1896 when Liberty introduced a kimono-shaped gown named ‘Kimono’ as a tea-gown with an illustration in their catalogue for the very first time. See Tamami Suoh, 「1880-1910 年代のイギリスにおける日本製室内着ーリバティ商会の通信販売カタログを手がかりとして」[‘Japanese-Made Gowns in British Liberty’s Catalogues 1880s-1910s’] 『ドレススタディ』 [*Dress Study*] 51.Spring (2007)
- 33 Anon, “*Liberty*” *Yule-Tide Gifts*, 1896: p.15.
- 34 Christopher Breward, ‘Popular Dressing: 1890-1914,’ Christopher Breward, Edwina Ehrman and Caroline Evans, eds., *The London Look: Fashion from Street to Catwalk* (London: Yale University Press, 2004): p.70.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p.70.
- 36 Elizabeth Kramer. “Not So Japan-Easy’: The British Reception of Japanese Dress in the Late Nineteenth Century,’ *Textile History* 44.1 (2013): p.20.
- 37 Lesley Downer, ‘Geisha: Perpetuating the Kimono Mystique,’ Anna Jackson, ed., *Kimono: Kyoto to Catwalk* (London: V&A Publishing, 2020): p.223.
- 38 *Ibid.*, p.224.
- 39 Sasai, *op cit.*, p.144.
- 40 Fred Dangerfield. ‘The Story of the White Chrysanthemum,’ *The Play Pictorial* 39.4 (1905): p.139.
- 41 Akiko Savas. ‘Dilute to Taste: Kimonos for the British Market at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century,’ *International Journal of Fashion Studies* 4.2 (2017): p.164.
- 42 Scott, *op cit.*, p.572.
- 43 Anon, ‘Our Captious Critic - ‘The White Chrysanthemum,’ at the Criterion Theatre,’ *The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, 16 September 1905: p.81.
- 44 *Ibid.*, p.81.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p.81.
- 46 *Ibid.*, p.81.
- 47 *Ibid.*, p.81.
- 48 Shintaryo Tawata explains that the scene of ‘women’ welcoming ‘men’ suggested in *The Geisha* and the tea house at the Japanese Native Village were

the perfect examples of how-society-should-be to the Victorian audience, which can also link to the expectation of the British travellers as imperialists. See Shintaryo Tawata. 「19 世紀西洋演劇におけるジャポニズム——「日本」の表象の変遷——」[‘Japonisme in the Western Theatres of the Nineteenth Century’] (Ph.D. Thesis, Gakushuin University, 2016): p.241.

49 Downer, *op cit.*, p.224.

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