

Red and pink silk kimono,
ca. 1930s. Ryerson
FRC2013.03.007. Gift of R.
Vanderpeer. Photograph by
Victoria Hopgood, 2018.



Ryerson University
Fashion Research Collection

THE KIMONO & THE HAORI

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The word kimono means “thing to wear” in Japanese; the original word is kirumono (Steele 2005; Milhaupt 2014). This paper seeks to analyze what aspects of kimono are sustainable. To answer that question two styles of kimono from the Ryerson Fashion Research Collection were examined using the methodology developed by Mida and Kim in *The Dress Detective* (2015). We will show that the elegant design of the kimono uses zero waste in its creation, allows for alteration and facilitates reuse, and the loose fit reinforces sustainable qualities of longevity.

Kimono are T-shaped robes with long wide sleeves cut in straight lines, and the haori is a variation thereof. Traditionally cut from a single width of fabric, there is virtually no waste in the creation of the garment. Although the wearing of traditional kimono has been in decline, kimono are still worn, but usually for milestone events such as weddings and graduations. Designs have evolved over time to incorporate modern ready to wear features such as zippers and Velcro or the use of washable polyester.



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A red and pink floral silk kimono: This red and pink floral silk kimono (FRC2013.03.007) has long sleeves that signal that this garment was intended to be worn by a young woman. The main textile is a colourful printed silk Rinzu (Imperatore et al., 2016), a textile weaving technique similar to jacquard. The printed floral pattern consists of undulating bands of colour in cherry blossom pink, ruby red and sea foam green layered with contrasting disks filled with florals, some of which are bordered with gold thread. The upper portion of the garment is lined in dark red silk and the lower portion in a lighter shade of red silk. The double-layered band collar uses a contrasting textile with a ruby and white floral pattern grounded in pale pink. The sleeves are slightly curved at the lower portion of the hemline. The garment would be held closed with an obi and does not emphasize any parts of the body. This silhouette accommodates various body types and sizes.

This garment is machine stitched and has been altered to shorten the length and sleeves of the garment using large hand-stitches. **The most unusual aspect of this garment is in the form of the alteration using a 3-inch fold that has been hand-stitched with white thread close to the high point shoulder to shorten the sleeve length.** This fold extends approximately 8-inches down on both the front and back of the garment. A fold approximately 6-inches deep has been hand-stitched with red thread at waist level to shorten the length of the garment. The location of the alteration was strategic, such that it would be concealed by the obi. **These simple and reversible alterations show how the kimono was restyled without cutting the textile and demonstrate the ethos of sustainability.**



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A burgundy red and black patterned haori: The haori is a short, lightweight coat, with a similar construction pattern as the kimono in a T-shape that is often worn over the kimono to protect it from stains and damage, or to add an extra layer for body warmth in the winter.

Originally a men's garment, during the Edo period (1615-1868) Geishas popularized its use and the haori is now considered a gender-neutral garment (Imperatore, 2016). This haori from the Ryerson Fashion Research Collection (FRC2017.01.002) dates to the 1990s, and the donor said she acquired and wore it in Japan. The garment is in excellent condition but has a small, yellow stain on the neckband that is somewhat concealed by the print. The main textile is crepe silk, and the lining is plain weave silk. The print motif is an overlap of three different flower styles probably printed using two processes: silkscreen for the base print and a stencil pattern for the big black flowers.



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Black and wine red
silk reversible haori,
ca. 1990s. Ryerson
FRC2017.01.002. Gift of
Deanna Horton. Fabric
detail. Photograph by
Victoria Hopgood, 2018.

Black and wine red
silk reversible haori,
ca. 1990s. Ryerson
FRC2017.01.002. Gift of
Deanna Horton. Sleeve
detail. Photograph by
Victoria Hopgood, 2018.

Like the kimono, the haori does not emphasize any part of the body. The front and back panels are joined by a strip of fabric that make it larger on the sides, probably to provide comfort for the wearer and more room to accommodate the garments that are worn underneath. The uniqueness of this garment lies in the details. The lining is meant to be shown, as it is a characteristic of this type of garment to be worn inside out (Imperatore, 2016) and there is a hand stitching on the base of the lining and sleeves. Another feature is the half-closed sleeve that creates an external pocket. The haori's neckbands are fastened parallel to each other by a silk cord, that ties together two loops inside each band, but this haori does not have a tie cord. This garment is reversible, which adds to its longevity and options for wear.

CAN THESE GARMENTS BE CONSIDERED SUSTAINABLE?

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals from January 2016 presented a global call to action on issues around poverty, peace and protecting our planet (see <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>). Included on this list of goals was a directive for the responsible consumption and production of garments, and this is demonstrated in multiple ways with the kimono and haori.



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Sustainability is demonstrated in the materials, print and finishing techniques used in the kimono and haori. Kimono are typically made with natural fibres such as silk, cotton and wool; and may use natural dyes such as the yuzen technique (which utilizes a natural dye made from rice paste mixed with soybeans and salt). **Sustainability is also demonstrated in the styling and cutting of the kimono and haori.** The most noticeable element that distinguishes kimono and haori from western garments is the loose fit that allows them to be worn by both genders and many types of bodies (Kawira, 2002). This means that fewer sizes are produced during manufacturing and the garment can be passed down or passed on to others diverting it from landfill. These aspects of its production render it sustainable. As well, the cutting technique of the kimono ensures there is no textile waste, and generally the pattern is woven or printed with the key locations of the body mapped out in advance (Kawira, 2002). Kimono are sometimes recycled by taking them apart, and the fabrics reused often for accessories such as bags, scarves, brooches, quilts, dolls, and other decorative objects and crafts (Yoshimura, 2015). **Cut with zero waste and altered in a reversible way, these elegant and timeless garments may be shared between generations, or the lengths of fabric may be reused or restyled into other garments. In this way, kimono and haori demonstrate sustainability.**

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