

# The Kimono

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Shodan Essay



# The Kimono

What is a kimono? Kimono simply means clothing or things to wear and is pronounced kee-mo-no. The plural of kimono is simply kimono. It has been worn by the Japanese for thousands of years by all sorts of people for all different reasons.

## Kimono History

The kimono-making technique wasn't developed until the Heian period, 794-1185. By cutting pieces of cloth in straight lines and sewing them together, allowed the kimono makers to not be concerned about the wearer's body. Other advantages came from the straight-line-cut method<sup>1</sup>, including the kimono being easy to fold and could be worn in all seasons. During this time, as the Japanese began to layer kimono, they developed a style where different color combinations represented seasons or political class.<sup>2</sup>

During the Muromachi and Kamakura periods, 1192-1573, practicality prevailed as the Samurai class began to rule. Because of the more active lifestyle Samurai lived<sup>3</sup>, the kimono became less elaborate and a new type of kimono, the kosode, meaning small sleeve, was developed.

During the Edo period, 1603-1868, the Tokugawa warrior clan, who ruled over Japan, divided Japan into feudal domains ruled by lords. The colors and patterns of the "uniforms" identified the samurais of each domain. The uniforms consisted of a kimono, a sleeveless garment known as a kamishimo worn over the kimono, and a hakama, a trouser-like split skirt. Because kimono makers had to make so many kimono for the samurai, they became masters at their craft and it developed into an art form. Because of the many artistic accomplishments made

to the kimono, they became more valuable and were handed down generation to generation. During this period, people continued to be defined with class and status by their kimono.

The Meiji period, 1868-1912, was heavily influenced by the West by the encouragement of the Japanese government. Cloth was imported to make the kimono. Although the law is no longer in effect today, during this time, it became required by law for government officials and military personnel to wear western clothing for official functions. For formal occasions, ordinary citizens were required to have their family's crest on their kimono. Sadly, during a earthquake in the Tasho period, 1912-1926, many of the older kimono were lost. <sup>1</sup>

Because the Japanese government taxed silk production during the Showa period, 1926-1989, to pay for military buildup, the kimono designs became less complex and material was conserved. But the production of the kimono was picked up again when Japan's economy recovered after World War II. The kimono was produced in greater quantities and became more affordable. Although Europe and America influenced the kimono's designs, their shape remained the same. Now, a Japanese person typically does not wear a kimono in everyday life, but only for special occasions and events. <sup>2</sup>

## Women's Kimono

Not only does one's kimono symbolize their class, but for woman, it can indicate her marital status. The proper length of a woman's kimono is all the way to her feet. <sup>4</sup> Although nowadays western clothing is common for everyday use, a Japanese woman would still wear a kimono for special occasions such as, festivals, the coming-of-age ceremony (held on January 15th of her 21st year), engagement, marriage, and death.

## Unmarried women:

In her late teens until her late 20's, it is customary for a young unmarried woman to wear large patterned, brightly colored kimono with long sleeves, called furisode on special occasions. The furisode has three different sleeve lengths: oburisode (full 105 cm), chuburisode (medium 90 cm), and kofurisode (short 75 cm). Traditionally, the long, flowing sleeves were meant to attract men. Today, however, the longer-sleeved furisode are considered more formal than the shorter-sleeved kimono.



## Married:



Once married, it is traditional for a woman to wear a kimono with smaller-patterns less vibrantly colored with short sleeves. Generally, as a woman ages, it is appropriate for her kimono to become more subdued with smaller patterns, duller colors, and smaller sleeves. Because it would be inappropriate for a married woman to wave her sleeves to attract men like single women, the sleeves are shorter, between 55 and 70 cm, and have openings smaller than the furisode.

A married woman has different kinds of kimono for various occasions. The most formal kimono is the kuro tomesode. The kuro tomesode is black with a colored design on the skirt of the kimono with five white crests, two on the front and three on



the back. A white silk under-kimono is worn under the kuro tomesode to create contrast.



For less formal events, the iro tomesode ("iro" meaning colored) is appropriate. The more formal iro tomesode have crests on them, and can be worn for slightly more formal occasions, while ones without crests are for less formal events.

Finally, the most informal kimono is the homongi, which unmarried women wear as well. Homongi literally translates as visit (homon) wear (gi), which accurately describes what the homongi is for, visiting people. It is also worn for occasion such as informal parties, tea gatherings, flower exhibitions, and for New Year's.<sup>5</sup>



## Men's Kimono



Although men typically wear kimono with conservative colors, such as blue, black, brown, gray, or white, they can be plain or with very elaborate patterns. The designs tend to be more masculine with scenes and motifs that include dragons, kanji symbols, bamboo canes or geometric patterns. A man's kimono comes to about mid-shin.<sup>4</sup> Contrasting with women's kimono open underarm sleeve, men's kimono's sleeves are sewn closed under the arm.<sup>6</sup>

## Children's kimono

When a young girl wears a kimono, she wears basically the same thing as any unmarried woman would. A girl's kimono would be brightly colored and have large patterns and would include a furisode and all the accessories including matching zori shoes, purses, obi belts and hair accessories. Normally, the only time a young girl would wear a kimono would be to celebrate holidays such as, New Year's, Hinamatsuri (Girl's Day) and Shichigosan (seven, five, three, is a celebration of children's growth at the ages of 3 and 7 for girls, and 5 for boys).<sup>5</sup> Young boys wear either a kimono or happi coat. For formal occasions and festivals, the kimono is worn with a wide belt.<sup>7</sup>



## Wedding Kimono

The groom wears a black kimono made from habutae silk and carrying the family crest, hakama, and a half-length black coat called a haori. The bride has option of two different wedding sets: the kanto and the kwansai. For the Kanto style, the bride wears a -colored over-kimono with long sleeves called a furisode uchikake over a white furisode kimono, called shiromuku and an elaborate hairpiece. For the kwansai, a woman must wear a nagajuban (under-kimono) and three ceremonial robes all together. Some brides wear neither the Kanto nor



the Kwansai style wedding ensembles. Instead they wear a formal patterned furisode kimono.

For her marriage ceremony, a bride may wear several special bridal furisode with to bring luck to her marriage.<sup>5</sup>

## Yukata

Traditionally, the yukata was worn after taking a bath and still is. But when the sophisticated public bath became popular, people began to wear the yukata in public. Today, the yukata is a lightweight cotton summer kimono worn by both men and women, young and old. Traditionally, the yakata's pattern is either navy-on-white or white-on-navy, but recently more colorful designs have emerged.<sup>8</sup>



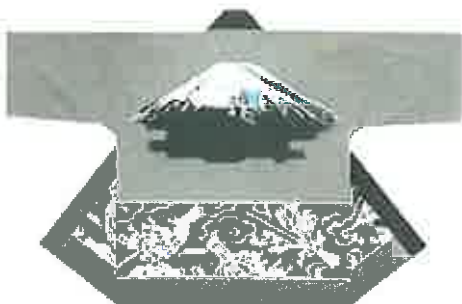
## Happi Coats

Traditionally, happi coats were worn by shop keepers and had the family's crest, shop name, or emblem printed on the back. Happi refers to a short length over coat or Japanese robe and has straight sleeves. This short robe

can be simple with a single color fabric or very elaborate with embroidered designs. Matsuri

happi coats, meaning festival coat, are worn for festivals

while the short sleeved taiko happi coat are used by taiko



drummers in the Japanese festivals.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, Japanese restaurant chefs wear a special happi coat called a hippari.<sup>10</sup>

## Hakama

Hakama, a pair of pleated pants, worn over a kimono, are worn today on formal occasions by both men and women. Originally, Hakama pants were created to protect samurai warriors' legs from brush when riding a horse. Today, the hakama is worn as formal attire for ceremonies, traditional Japanese dance, artists and martial arts.<sup>11</sup>



In the martial arts, it is said that the seven pleats of a hakama represent the seven virtues of bushido which are:

1. Gi --the right decision
2. Yu -- bravery
3. Jin -- universal love, benevolence toward mankind; compassion
4. Rei -- right action, courtesy
5. Makoto -- sincerity, truthfulness
6. Meiyō -- honor
7. Chūgi -- devotion, loyalty<sup>12</sup>

## Obi

Koshi-Himo Sash- the first belt tied around the waist.



Date-Jime Belt- the second belt tied around the kimono covering the





first koshi-himo belt.

Obi - Jime- a braided cord tied on top of the obi. Because the obi-jime is visible, it comes in a variety of colors and the color is chosen to compliment the obi.



### Formal Obi

Typically a woman's formal obi is 4 meters long and 60 centimeters in width and is made of silk brocade or tapestry weave. A general rule of thumb is the more patterns, and more formal. A bride's obi is normally completely covered with woven or embroidered designs. To tie it, the width is folded in half and is wrapped twice around the waist and tied in the back.



### Casual Obi

A casual obi can be between 10-30 centimeters and is made of satin, twill, chirimen, gauze weaves, cotton, nylon or wool. These casual obis are not embellished like the formal obis are.



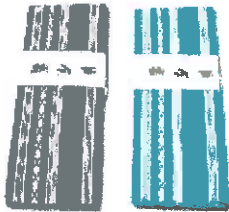
### Butterfly Obi Belts

The butterfly obi is deceiving. This complicated looking obi is actually pre-tied and is very simple to put on. The tied bow shape is called cho cho. The belt consists of two pieces; the wide belt and the bow. The belt is 5 feet in



length and 6 inches in width. The belt is wrapped twice around the waist and tucked under. The bow has a wire hanger to insert into the wrapped around belt.

### Men's Obi



Men have two options when it comes to obis, either the kaku (left) or heko (right). The stiff belt is called kaku obi. The kaku obi is about 3.5 inches in width and made of cotton. The soft obi sash is called a heko obi and is normally free flowing and made of tie-dyed fabrics.<sup>13</sup>



### Footwear

There are two basic types of Japanese footwear: the geta and the zori. Normally, the kimono length is adjusted so that the shoes and socks are visible. Even though red and black are the most popular colors, Japanese sandals and shoes come in a variety of colors and styles.<sup>14</sup>

### Zori

Any Japanese sandal that has a flat bottom is a zori sandal, including both the tatami sandals and vinyl zori sandals. The zori sandal, worn by both men and women, are made in a variety of colors and materials.

### Tatami Sandals



Tatami sandals are casual sandals and are commonly used for daily wear. The sandals are called tatami which means straw. The surface of the sandal is made from woven tatami (straw).

The thong is made of velvet and comes in either red or black.

### Vinyl Zori Sandals

For formal occasions, the black vinyl zori sandal is worn. The thongs come in a variety of colors and are either made of velvet or vinyl.



There are also less formal vinyl zori sandals that are worn with the yukata.

The difference is that the vinyl surface has a straw tatami pattern.<sup>15</sup>



### Geta Sandals

Any sandal with a separate heel is a geta sandals. The wooden geta sandal is the most well known. There are, however, many other types of geta sandals including those made of vinyl.



Wooden geta have a slightly tapered front heel, making the person lean forward with each step, making it difficult to walk in. Geta sandals take a lot of practice to walk correctly.

For formal occasions with the kimono, the vinyl geta is worn. The thongs are normally made of velvet or vinyl and come in a variety of colors.<sup>16</sup>

### Tabi

Tabi are Japanese socks that have a split in the sock for the large toe so that they may comfortably be worn with sandals. There are two basic types of tabi: tabi boots and tabi socks.

## Tabi Boots

tabi boots, also called odori tabi socks are made of cotton and have a vinyl sole bottom with clasps on the back.



## Tabi Socks



Stretch tabi socks are made of 100% nylon. The light weight stretchy fabric makes them very comfortable, can be machine washed, and are quick to put on. <sup>17</sup>

## Kimono Patterns

Japanese kimono patterns vary for each season. In the spring, bright colors and spring floral patterns are worn. Similarly, in autumn, fall colors and patterns are worn. Kimono patterns with designs, such as pine trees and bamboo, which symbolized good luck and prosperity are dominate. <sup>18</sup> The summertime yukata is usually navy blue and white to represent water. <sup>8</sup>

A Kimono with patterns that are woven, dyed, or have repetitive patterns are seen as informal. Free-style designs dyed over the whole surface or along the hem of the kimono are considered more formal. <sup>18</sup>



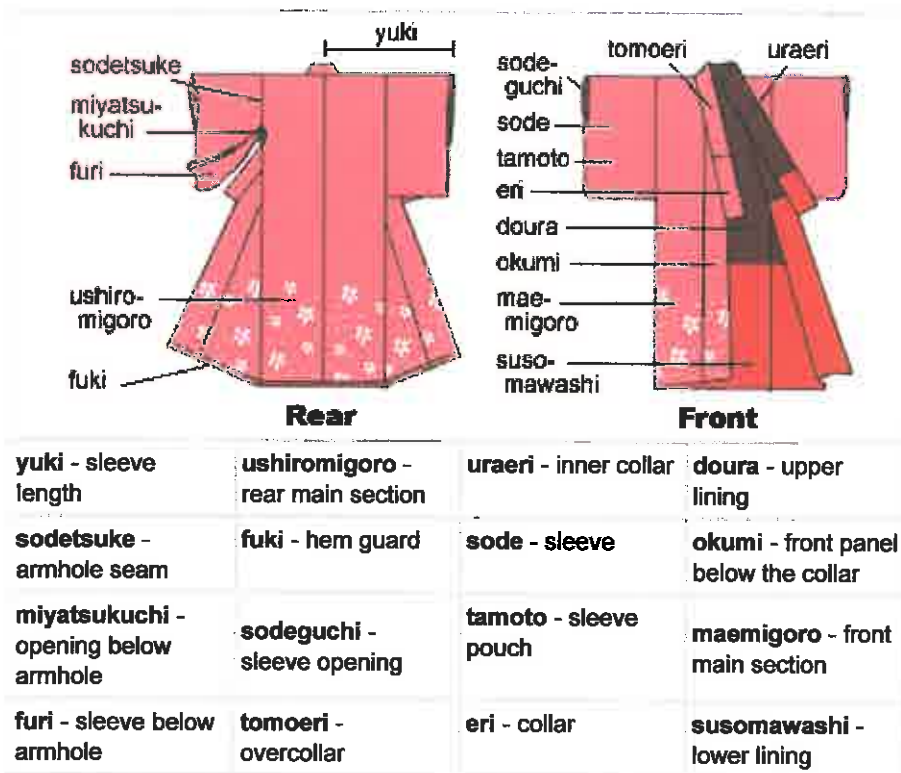
## How to Wear a Kimono:

1. Always, put on white tabi socks first. It is difficult to bend to put on socks after the full kimono and belt is on.

2. Put on the undergarment slips called juban consisting of a white cotton top and skirt.  
Today, an alternative is to wear only the white collar that goes around the neck called the eri-sugata.
3. Put on the kimono, making sure the back seam is centered.
4. For both men and women, wrap the right side of the kimono over the body, and then overlap it with the left side. Right on top of the left is only used to dress a corpse for burial.
5. Adjust the white slip collar to show evenly around the neck just under the kimono collar. <sup>19</sup>
6. Pull up the kimono material so the length of the kimono is at the ankle.
7. As you hold the extra material above your waist, tie the koshi-himo belt below the excess material. Cross the belt in the back and tie it in the front.
8. Straighten out the excess material to the side so that the front and the back of the kimono are smooth.
9. Bring down the excess material to cover the belt.
10. Take the date-jime belt and wrap it around your waist covering the koshi-himo belt.  
Tie the date-jime belt in the front leaving the overlapping kimono fabric visible below. The excess kimono fabric should hang evenly below the belt so that the fabric is seen.
11. Place the long obi fabric around the waist with the ends toward the front. Position the obi fabric so that about 50 cm of the belt is in your left hand and wrap it once more around the waist.

12. Overlap the ends of the obi toward the front so that it crosses over and tie the belt once with the right end over the left.
13. You will now have one shorter end towards the top and one long end hanging down.  
Twist the tie so that the short end goes over your right shoulder.
14. Fold the long bottom end in half or twice to get the size bow you want. This end is the actual right and left side of the bow.
15. To make the center tie that holds the bow together, take the end that is over your shoulder and wrap it around the center of your folded piece several times. Any excess portion of the belt should be hidden underneath.
16. Turn the belt around toward your back. <sup>13</sup>

Parts of a Kimono



The kimono has been around for thousands of years. One can tell a lot about a person by the kimono they wear. For example, for women, it can show if they are married or not and if she is going to a casual or formal occasion. Kimono also differ from season to season. The accessories, such as the shoes and obis, are different for different people and different events as well. The kimono is a unique piece of Japan's heritage that shows the beauty of the Japanese culture.



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3. <http://web.mit.edu/jpnet/kimono/history-muromachi.html>
4. A Comprehensive Encyclopedic Dictionary of Japanese Martial Arts (kimono- page 165)
5. <http://www.moa.ubc.ca/Exhibitions/Online/Student/Kimono/type~1.htm>
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