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Framing Fashionability: Clothing, Identity, and the Hybrid Aesthetic of Interwar Japan

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Abstract

This article re-examines the modern girl (moga) in interwar Japan by focusing on the evolving role of clothing within fashion culture. While most scholarship positions youfuku (Western-style clothing) as the sole marker of modernity, this article argues that kimono remained a central and actively reimagined element of moga identity. Drawing on theories of fashion history and postcolonial hybridity, I show how clothing was a tool through which women negotiated new social roles and embodied hybrid identities. This study moves beyond the elite representations of moga in advertising and film to explore the material practices of ordinary women. Through case studies of two interwar women's magazines—Fujin Gahō and Shufu no Tomo—the article demonstrates how visual and textual media shaped the everyday aesthetics and aspirations of working- and middle-class women. Primary sources including oral histories and magazine surveys reveal that hybrid dress was not just an elite phenomenon but a widespread cultural negotiation. Whether through department store displays, magazine sewing patterns, or repurposed kimono, women blended Japanese and Western styles in ways that reflected conformity and creativity. By highlighting these underexplored forms of participation and reception, this article contributes a more inclusive and materially grounded account of fashion modernity in Japan. It challenges persistent binaries of East/West and tradition/modernity, and offers new insight into how clothing mediated identity formation during a period of rapid cultural transformation.

Keywords: moga (modern girl), interwar japan, japanese modernity, modern femininity

Introduction

The lived experiences of real-life moga present a compelling counterpoint to dominant narratives in the history of Japanese modernity which have too often focused on elite representations in commercial culture. The term moga, shorthand for modan garu (modern girl), referred to young urban women in modern Japan who embraced new fashions, social freedoms, and modern lifestyles. These women's fashion choices—particularly their use of kimono—reveal how economic, social, and cultural pressures shaped the everyday negotiation of modern feminine identity in interwar Japan. Most scholarly studies on moga have superficially assumed a binary view that youfuku (Western-style clothing) was the material manifestation of modernity, whilst kimono denoted unchanging traditions. Anthropologist Liza Dalby argues that it was during the Taishō period when kimono's status as the national dress was 'consolidated' (1993, p. 129). Social anthropologist Mikiko Ashikari argues that while youfuku continued to transform, kimono preserved Japanese nationalist styles by being unchanged in its traditional form (2003, p. 68). I do not agree with Dalby and Ashikari that kimono retained its power as representative of Japanese traditions by being frozen in style. Contrary to this simplistic assumption, kimono remained central to modern femininity by undergoing significant material, symbolic, and representational transformations during the interwar years.

This paper explores how moga from various social and economic backgrounds distinguished themselves, both in appearance and behaviour, not only from one another but also from the broader society. Fashion was a key site for expressing moga identity, alongside facial makeup (Tso, 2025). Clothing choices were a means of social regulation, and at times 'a form of defiance' (Kawamura, 2013, p. 33). Moga culture was not merely represented through clothing, but also hairstyle, speech mixed with English, liberated behaviour, and a new way of life. It is the purpose of this paper to analyse the fashion of real-life moga, particularly how kimono—rather than being discarded—was reimagined as part of their evolving modern identities. Moga culture was a reflection of the 'extravagance' of the Taishō period; moga often maintained 'a dual wardrobe' in order to present their modern identity to others (Francks, 2015, p. 337). While historian Miriam Silverberg's foundational work on the modern girl identifies moga as a media-produced composite figure shaped by consumer media, integrating elements like fashion, cinema, and cosmetics (2006), this article builds on her insights by focusing more directly on the material and embodied practices of ordinary women. Rather than reading the moga only as a discursive or ideological figure, I explore how women across class positions

participated in modernity through sewing, shopping, and visual consumption, and how these acts of self-fashioning often blurred the boundaries between consumer and creator. Methodically, I draw on theories of fashion history and postcolonial hybridity to situate Japanese clothing within the broader terrain of modern material culture. Through examples from printed artefacts and first-hand interviews, kimono is shown to have undergone numerous changes. Its combination with hairstyles and other subtle details was the evidence of moga's rejection of traditions and progression towards modernity. Contrary to the message that most studies send—that women switched to youfuku exclusively—this period saw a surge in women donning kimono, as I demonstrate with primary sources from women's magazines. I use two representative publications, Fujin Gahō and Shufu no Tomo, as case studies to demonstrate the shifting norms that defined interwar womanhood. Their visual and textual strategies offer a window into how moga identities were cultivated and communicated to a mass readership. I argue that kimono was not simply a remnant of tradition but an active, evolving medium through which moga identities were imagined, negotiated, and performed in interwar Japan.

Methodology: Fashion History

It is important to first understand the meanings of kimono in Japanese culture. Sociologist Stephanie Assmann defines kimono as a 'reinvented tradition' that signifies the continued importance it plays in Japanese society despite its constant developments (2008, p. 360). The 'non-functionality' of kimono is part of its function in that it displays wealth and grandeur (2008, p. 362), and also 'discipline' and 'hierarchy (2008, p. 367). Kimono's place in Japanese society, and more importantly Japanese femininity, was not diminished by the adoption of youfuku; kimono changed and became even more representative of Japaneseness when women started to have youfuku to choose as a comparison, making kimono the proper and formal attire of choice that continued to materialise Japanese femininity.

My discussion of interwar clothing styles and hand-sewn manipulation of garments demonstrates the many transformations kimono has gone through. Kimono is commonly seen as 'unfettered by Western influences' (Kramer, 2006, p. 207). These arguments are unsound, as my primary research shows that kimono has undergone major changes whilst reinforcing its status and significance as the national dress throughout modernisation. The basic cutting of the dress continued to look similar, but there were major changes in its patterns, such as the 'dramatically

enlarged… new designs inspired by Western styles' (V&A, 2016). This was the result of new technologies in textile manufacturing that enabled low-cost mass production (Atkins Ed., 2005), using 'electronic spinning machines and jacquard looms from Europe', as well as experimentation with chemical and natural dyes that led to 'dazzling' new designs (V&A, 2016). Later in the 1930s, kimono was also used as propaganda, with prints including warfare motifs such as fighter jets, warships, and the national emblem of Japan (Atkins Ed., 2005). One interviewee describes that 'reformed kimono,' which were youfuku made with old kimono cloth, or kimono with modern patterns, became hugely popular in the moga's dual wardrobe (Shiratori, 2017).

The transformations of kimono highlight the broader relationship between dress and lived experience in modern Japan. It is therefore useful to learn the basic principles of fashion history before its application to my subject. Fashion has been understood and studied in a multitude of ways. Some of the founding perspectives when this new field emerged stem from semiotician Roland Barthes' canonical work The Fashion System, where he sees fashion magazines as the tools required for deciphering fashion trends because clothing is a form of communication (1990). This view echoes the argument in The Theory of the Leisure Class by Thorstein Veblen (2007) and is later reiterated in another key cultural studies text by Pierre Bourdieu—Distinction (2010). By analysing fashion magazines, one begins to understand how 'taste and tastemaking' were phenomena choreographed by 'fashion gatekeepers' in order to determine and reinforce class structures (Castaldo Lundén, 2020, p. 254). In this chapter, I adopt a multi-method approach that draws from semiotic, material, and socio-cultural readings of dress. Like historian Malcolm Barnard (2003), I view clothing not as a fixed sign system, but as a socially embedded set of practices that carry gendered, classed, and national meanings. I also draw on oral historian Joanne Eicher's work to attend to sensory experiences, especially in relation to oral history interviews about touch, heat, and bodily restriction or freedom (2021, p. 777). These methods are particularly suited to the study of everyday moga, whose engagement with fashion often unfolded through embodied practice, adaptation, and local knowledge, rather than through direct consumption of high fashion.

Theory: Hybridity

Japan is a rare case, as it had not been colonised or explored before the Meiji Restoration in the late 1800s; the general Orientalist approach does not apply directly as the nation took a starkly different path from other colonised Asian countries like China and India. Numerous primary sources from the turn of the century have attempted to explain Japanese behaviours, through travelogues (Chamberlain, 1891; Curtis, 1906), retelling of Japanese folklore (Hearn, 1904), government reports (Satow, 1921), and academic studies (Benedict, 1946; Bryan, 1927). These works that introduced Japan to the West uniformly created popular images that sustained Western cultures as superior to the 'others' (Narumi, 2000). A recurring trope is the infantilisation of Japan. Novels and operas presented romanticised images of Japanese women as small, childlike, and dependent in contrast to the authoritative and rational West (Yoshihara, 2003). Anthropologist Brian Moeran discusses how Western thinkers and artists perceived Japanese people as structurally different—'naïve' and 'dainty' (1996, p. 80). Art historian Elisa Evett similarly summarises how this perception positioned Japan as innocent and passive, seeing the world 'simply, unreflectively, and without the interference of thought' (1983, p. 87). This childlike view echoes how Japanese society and men treated moga, reinforcing expectations of women as youthful, submissive, and decorative, even while social realities demanded that they take on adult responsibilities in the workforce and at home.

Theorist Homi Bhabha challenges such binary logics through his theory of hybridity, which sees all cultures as constantly changing and shaped through encounters with others (1994). No Western culture 'totally dominates' others because when two cultures meet, there is always resistance and assimilation with authentic practices (1994, pp. 223-9). Bhabha argues that hybridity 'emphasises the incommensurable elements—the stubborn chunks—as the basis of cultural identifications,' allowing for tensions and contradictions between systems rather than assuming complete synthesis (1994, p. 219). Hybridity is thus a theoretical framework that resists static categories. It sees identity as shaped through negotiation, contradiction, and the selective adoption of new forms. This framework is especially helpful for understanding Japan's unique status as both a coloniser and a modernising power in the early 20th century (Slade, 2020, p. 838). In applying Bhabha's theory of hybridity to the Japanese context, I recognise that Japan's engagement with Western modernity differed from the postcolonial frameworks originally envisioned by Bhabha. Japan's imperial ambitions complicate the notion of cultural

subordination, suggesting a form of hybridity that was strategic and self-directed. The moga's fashion practices of selectively adopting, reworking, or resisting Western dress reflect this dynamic: not the absorption of foreign identity, but its transformation into a uniquely Japanese mode of modern self-expression. The perception that moga simply copied Western dress and behaviour ignores the ways in which they adapted foreign styles to suit their own purposes. If moga were indeed blindly copying everything Western, would they have worn kimono as dressing gowns, as Western women often did? The absence of evidence for such practices suggests that moga were actively selecting and combining cultural elements, not replicating them wholesale.

The theory of hybridity is especially useful for understanding the kimono not as a static traditional garment, but as a site of ongoing negotiation between national identity and global fashion influences. In the hands of interwar women, especially moga, kimono was often transformed, restyled, or juxtaposed with Western elements, producing new and hybrid visual identities. These hybrid fashions were not uniform; they differed by class, region, and context. What they shared, however, was an engagement with modernity that was both culturally specific and visually experimental. In what follows, I explore how this negotiation played out in the material and cultural practices of everyday women navigating modern life.

Reception of Clothing Reform

The 1870s saw the beginning of government initiatives focused on women's clothing. The Ministry of Education, established in 1871, began promoting female education and encouraged the wearing of *hakama*, loose trousers, for schoolgirls on the grounds of functionality and health. Clothing reform was tied to the *ryōsai kenbo* (good wife, wise mother) ideal and focused on practicality rather than fashionability (Cambridge, 2011). Nonetheless, the 1880s through the 1920s, educational reforms made girls' schooling compulsory, and by 1886, the Tokyo Women's Normal School adopted fully Western-style uniforms. By the 1920s, sailor-style uniforms had become commonplace in girls' schools. These changes catalysed a broader transformation in the clothing industry. Female students became a visible and growing social entity, stimulating demand for uniforms and leading to a surge in both professional and amateur garment production (Namba, 2018, p. 97). Women learned dressmaking through magazines, vocational courses, and apprenticeships with tailors (Namba, 2018, p. 106). As access to sewing machines spread, mass media began to play a key role in disseminating techniques and patterns (Pyun, 2018,

p. 286). Outside the realm of school uniforms, clothing remained socially divided. Professional men had adopted Western business attire by the 1920s, but many working women still wore a combination of kimono and uniform-style jackets. A full garb in Western style for women was impractical; only wealthy women who did not have to work chose to wear those styles in the early days of adopting European clothing. 'Career women' in offices and department stores were commonly photographed wearing kimono to work; the adoption of Western styles was gradual and uneven (Cambridge, 2011, p. 176).

Cultural leaders began to frame kimono as outdated and dangerous for modern life. Critics claimed its long sleeves and trailing fabric restricted movements. One often-cited case was the Shirokiya Department Store fire in 1932, where women in kimono were reportedly unable to escape or jump into safety nets (Nakagawa & Rosovsky, 1963, p. 66). This anecdote became part of a broader discourse portraying kimono as impractical, while Western clothing as rational, modern, and safe. At the same time, domestic realities complicated these narratives. *Tatami* (straw mats) living spaces, where people sat on the floor, made Western dresses impractical. Thus, many people, including celebrities photographed in Western dress, practised hybrid fashion: wearing *youfuku* in public, and kimono at home. As millions of people lost possessions after the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake, replacements were increasingly Western-style. The spread of new dance halls, gymnasiums, and other social venues created new contexts in which Western clothing felt more appropriate. *Youfuku* began to become the choice of wear both inside and outside the home from the 1930s as women started to lead more active lives in both spheres (Nakagawa & Rosovsky, 1963, pp. 65-67).

These sartorial contradictions where Western clothing promoted as rational and modern, and kimono retained for its aesthetics and domestic practicality, created fertile ground for the emergence of hybrid dress codes among modern women. Rather than abandoning kimono, many *moga* adopted a dual wardrobe and experimented with fusions: wearing Western shoes with kimono, styling reformed kimono with European accessories, or repurposing family garments with updated patterns. This hybridity was not limited to wealthy women; working- and middle-class women accessed fashion through sewing, visual consumption, and informal networks of exchange.

'Everyday Moga': Modes of Dress Practice

The modern woman's sartorial identity in interwar Japan was constructed not only through the acquisition of fashionable garments, but also through varied forms of material engagement with fashion—from aspiration and imitation, to repurposing, self-making, and selective adoption. These practices cut across class boundaries and complicate the assumed divide between elite consumers and everyday women. While women with disposable income may have had greater access to ready-made Western garments, women of more modest means also participated in modern fashion through DIY, exchange, and improvisation. I call this group the 'everyday *moga*.' Their contact with Western styles enabled them to construct self-images that were rational, modern, and fashionable—qualities tied to aspirations for mobility and alignment with Western civilisations. The growth of the female working and middle classes in cities generated demand for popular magazines and films, further spreading awareness of Western styles (Ashikari, 2003, p. 68). One interviewee recalled that although she and her sisters could not afford *youfuku*, they accessed visual culture through magazines and Hollywood films. She adored her school uniform because it was Western-looking, 'practical and easy to move in'. She describes *youfuku* as 'delightful and visually uplifting,' while kimono as 'hot like a desert in the summer.' Yet she believes that kimono symbolises 'traditional beauty' and wears it for rites of passage and New Year's Day (Shiratori, 2017). This duality echoes the simultaneous traditional and modern identity of interwar women.

While not all women could afford fashionable garments, they participated in fashion culture through the act of looking. Public commercial spaces, especially department stores, were among the earliest arenas where women confronted and interpreted modern style (Hong, 2016, p. 124). *Moga*'s 'visions' and knowledge of modernity were obtained through the consumption of store displays, cinema, street flyers, and other popular cultures (Tipton & Clark, 2000, p. 443). As fashion historian Ilya Parkins argues, looking itself becomes a gendered act of subject formation (Parkins, 2012). Knowledge of trends or fabrics became cultural capital. Women recognised themselves as modern through visual alignment as much as physical dress. After seeing the latest fashion from shop windows and magazines, women then actively took part in self-fashioning through their own creations.

Dressmaking became a commonplace practice for women in the twentieth century and is significant in that it reveals important trends on 'individual design and creativity,' and also 'collective and individual identity' (Burman, 1999, p. 14). In the 1920s and 1930s, big cities in Japan saw a rapid growth in the number of sewing

schools and clothes shops, especially those with female owners (Gordon, 2007, p. 7). This was a phenomenon also found in other countries; the widespread circulation of do-it-yourself techniques through a range of channels, both formal and informal, available to the public made it 'a ubiquitous object' central to everyday modern life (Aynsley & Forde Eds., 2007, p.1). This step from spectator to maker marked a shift in how women related to fashion. To support this home-based creativity, women turned to magazines not just for fashion spreads, but for practical resources like sewing patterns, advice, and visual inspiration.

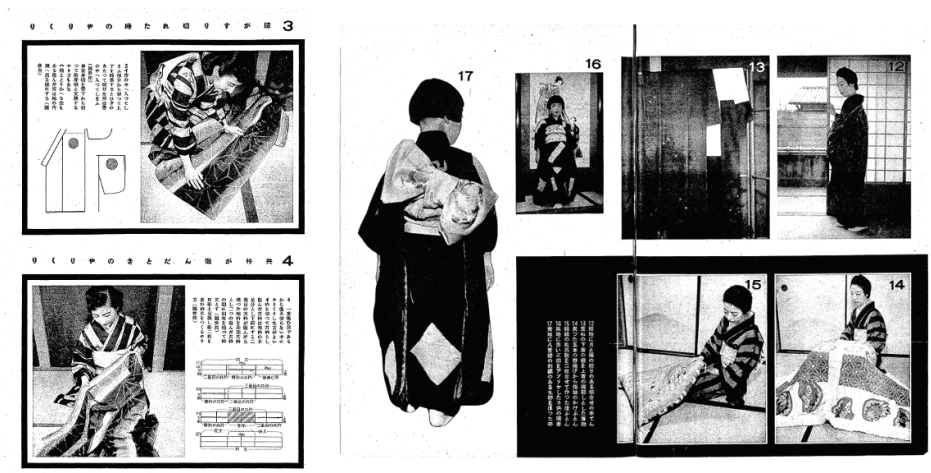
Magazines served as a key vehicle for the dissemination of these trends, not only for their content but also because the act of reading itself was also a source of enjoyment (Aynsley & Forde Eds., 2007). Readers consumed ads, patterns, and aspirational imagery as knowledge even without purchasing products. For women in rural Japan, mail-order catalogues and mass media played a key role in linking them to national and modern life (Tipton & Clark, 2000, p. 443). One interviewee described how her grandmother, born in 1906, created handmade *youfuku* from recycled kimono for her children to wear on New Year and graduation. In her own life, fashion was subordinated to raising six children and coping with war. 'It was forbidden to wear beautiful and showy clothing,' she recalled. Yet she remembered longing to wear 'colourful and pretty skirts' she saw in advertisements (Watanabe, 2017). These moments illustrate that fashion consciousness and creativity persisted during economic hardship or social disruption. The handmade *youfuku* worn by children on special occasions, sewn from repurposed kimono, signalled a desire to partake in the symbolic language of modern fashion under difficult circumstances. As Miriam Silverberg reminds us, the *moga* was a composite figure, assembled from fragments of cloth, cinema, cosmetics, and aspiration (2006). Modern femininity was not only expressed through new consumption, but through negotiation with the realities of care, constraint, and self-fashioning. Sewing from existing garments, particularly kimono, allowed women to hybridise styles. To better understand how ideas of fashionability were communicated and consumed, I now turn to two case studies of women's magazines that mediated style, aspiration, and identity for a wide readership.

Fashion spreads in women's magazines such as *Fujin Gahō* (The Woman's Illustrated Gazette, 1905 to present) and *Shufu no Tomo* (Housewives' Companion, 1917-2008) promoted seasonal and reformed kimono in modern patterns, often accompanied by captions and style guidance as seen in Figure 1. These publications

became powerful cultural artefacts that chronicled the evolving role of women. The two magazines represent different price points and levels of accessibility. Nestled within the upper echelons of society, *Fujin Gahō* epitomised elegance and refinement as it targeted an affluent readership. Catering to a different social demographic, *Shufu no Tomo* emerged as a publication for the masses, specifically middle- and lower-middle-class housewives (Takeda, 2017, p. 237). The following examples illustrate how each magazine shaped dress culture in different ways.

Figure 1

Inside spreads of Fujin Gahō with examples of reformed kimono: fabric repurposed into new garment and household items such as quilts



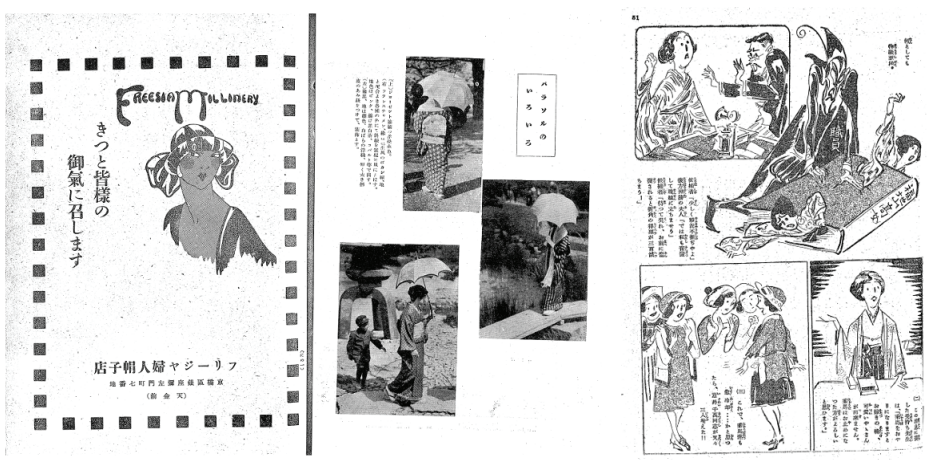
Note. Fujin Gahō, no. 454 (December 1941). Bunka Gakuen University Library, Tokyo.

Fujin Gahō is a pioneering women's magazine that continues to capture the cultural landscape since its inception in 1905. Issues from 1924 to 1933 reveal a nuanced portrait of how the publication shaped evolving ideals of womanhood and fashionability. It serves as a window to the shifting trends in dating, marriage, childrearing, and family life. By June 1924, the aftermath of the Great Kantō Earthquake (September 1923) and the cultural momentum of the Taishō period bring marked shifts in both the aesthetic and ideological terrain of *Fujin Gahō*. The Western-dressed woman on the cover—surrounded by art, flowers, and Western paintings—signals an urban, affluent femininity that contrasts with the imperial

solemnity of the 1910s. This issue embraces an overt cosmopolitanism: features on fashionable outfits, art exhibitions, and interior trends suggest a hybrid modernity in which bourgeois domestic life coexists with the international circulation of ideas and clothing styles. What is especially notable is the magazine's careful negotiation between Western and Japanese identities. Photographs and illustrations often depict women in traditional kimono with modern haircuts, or set them in spatial juxtapositions such as Western-style interiors, cafés, parasols, and paintings that articulate a visual grammar of *moga* modernity, as shown in Figure 2. Despite its modernist flair, this issue also reinscribes gendered domestic roles.

Figure 2

Inside spreads of Fujin Gahō showing illustrations and photographs juxtaposing women in Western and traditional Japanese attire



Note. From *Fujin Gahō*, no. 224 (June 1924). Bunka Gakuen University Library, Tokyo.

The 1933 March issue of *Fujin Gahō* represents a visual and discursive epitome of *moga* representation. All 12 covers that year featured a woman alone, dressed in Western fashion, engaged in leisure or physical activity, symbolic of autonomy and aspiration. Inside, the magazine's format expands physically (fold-out pages), graphically (photomontage, sans serif fonts, *Abstract* geometry), and conceptually, embracing a fusion of mass culture and modernist design. The photospreads and advertisements blur into each other, and the line between editorial and marketing collapses into a modern aesthetic experience. Femininity in the March issue is

positioned less as moral virtue or national duty, and more as a visual project and aspirational identity, constantly cultivated through fashion, makeup, and domestic performance. The articles are saturated with advice, from how to tailor fashionable sleeves to how to sing traditional songs, indicating that modern womanhood required both stylistic fluency and cultural flexibility. Figure 3 illustrates that readers were invited to inhabit roles as curators of self, stitching together identities from fashion and activities of their choice. The 1924 and 1933 *Fujin Gahō* issues offer insight into how the *moga* was visually constructed through both traditional and modern cues, with clothing acting as a bridge.

Figure 3

Inside spreads of Fujin Gahō depicting women in Western dress and in traditional attire, suggesting that women could selectively perform femininity by choosing between modern and traditional styles

Note. From *Fujin Gahō*, no. 333 (March 1933). Bunka Gakuen University Library, Tokyo.

While *Fujin Gahō* visualised the *moga* as self-directed and socially mobile, *Shufu no Tomo* offered more constrained imagery that was more prescriptive. Its focus on traditional attire and domestic advice still positioned fashion as a central element of womanhood, even if within more conservative frames. The predominance of kimono and passive poses in *Shufu no Tomo* covers illustrate how fashion modernity was not uniformly imagined. For working-class women, modernity was visualised not through bodily freedom, but through appropriateness, neatness, and seasonal

change. First published in 1917, *Shufu no Tomo* was designed to cater to a broad readership, particularly focusing on middle- and lower-middle-class homemakers and working women who sought guidance on managing their daily lives. By 1924, *Shufu no Tomo* has become one of the most successful women's magazines. Its monthly circulation reached an estimated 1.8 million throughout the 1930s (Tanaka, 2011, p. 125). I conducted a survey of the cover designs from 240 issues published between 1918 and 1941. In my analysis of the covers, it is undeniable that these publications were created for women about women, as evidenced by the consistent focus on female portraits. Each cover prominently features the illustrated head and upper torso of an anonymous woman, with her face and the upper part of her clothing visible. I meticulously catalogued the occurrences of various visual elements, including whether the women were smiling and wearing different clothing. Despite the growing influence of Western culture during this time, traditional Japanese attire remained dominant on the covers. Out of all the covers, approximately 180 featured women in kimono, while approximately 40 depicted women in Western-style *youfuku*. There were about 10 covers showing a mix of Japanese and Western elements, such as pairing kimono with fur scarves or hats—popular Western-style accessories of the time. Some notable deviations in attire included five covers featuring Western swimsuits, four showing traditional Japanese work clothes, four showcasing women in military uniforms, and one depicting a traditional Chinese *qipao* in the late 1930s. Of the 200 or so covers, there were only around 20 in which women were shown engaging in specific activities. These ranged from women caressing their babies (ten instances), reading (three), playing cards (one), to more domestic roles such as holding animals (two), and sewing (one). This visual tendency toward static, fashion-focused representations suggests that *Shufu no Tomo* was less concerned with showcasing women as active and more focused on idealised images of passive femininity.

Women's magazines, alongside department stores, played a crucial role in shaping *moga*'s fashion knowledge and practices. They introduced working- and middle-class women to new styles and provided practical tools for self-fashioning such as sewing patterns and advertisements. This participation of creating their own clothing contributed to defining modern aesthetics and society's views on femininity, despite the fact that many *moga* were not physically purchasing the latest fashion items due to limited financial means (Hackley, 2002, p. 89). These everyday acts complicate the narrative that fashion modernity belonged only to the elite. For the everyday *moga*, dressmaking and visual literacy created space for aspiration and agency.

Conclusion: Clothing as a Tool of Modernisation and Aspiration

Clothing in interwar Japan functioned not only as a marker of social status or aesthetic taste, but as a crucial medium through which women negotiated modern identities. This article has challenged the prevailing assumption that Western clothing signified modernity while kimono represented tradition. Instead, I have demonstrated that kimono, through its evolving materials, tailoring practices, styling choices, and symbolic uses, remained central to *moga* identity across class and cultural boundaries. From department store displays to home-sewn garments, fashion culture in this period was not defined by clear-cut transitions, but by hybridity, improvisation, and experimentation. Applying theories of fashion history and postcolonial hybridity, I have shown how the clothed body became a site of negotiation between modern aspiration and material constraint. The *moga*, in her many forms, engaged with these tensions through embodied style and imaginative identification. Whether browsing department store windows, sewing *youfuku* from old kimono cloth, or donning hybrid outfits on university campuses, women used clothing to position themselves within new social parameters.

Magazines such as *Fujin Gahō* and *Shufu no Tomo* promoted Western and Japanese styles side by side—not just new looks, but new ways of being modern. At the same time, oral histories reveal how these images were interpreted, reworked, or resisted in everyday life. The figure of the modern Japanese woman in the interwar period cannot be understood through simple binaries of East/West and tradition/modernity. This continues to resonate in Japanese fashion subcultures today. Styles like *ganguro* (black face) and *rorita* (Lolita) reflect similar strategies of blending conformity with rebellion. Home sewing remains popular, especially among subcultural communities where brand-name garments are prohibitively expensive (Kawamura, 2013, p. 188). Meanwhile, the kimono has re-emerged as a status symbol, worn as daily wear by wealthy individuals attending *kabuki* theatre or repurposed in haute couture design. These contemporary echoes show how the *moga*'s approach to self-fashioning of mixing and matching Japanese and Western elements with care and creativity remains a legacy of enduring relevance. This article contributes to fashion studies by rethinking how clothing mediates modern identity formation in a non-Western context. It complements recent work that examines media aesthetics, sewing culture, and embodied modernities, but brings new insight by centring working- and middle-class women in Japan, figures often sidelined in scholarship focused on elite consumption or Western case studies. By tracing how women learned, adapted, and performed

fashionability across social and material constraints, this study offers a new lens on the interwar Japanese.

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