

My JSPS Short-Term Fellowship ran from 1st November 2015 to 25th September 2016 at Nanzan University Anthropological Institute with my host researcher, Professor Akira Goto. This enabled me to conduct the fieldwork crucial for my DPhil (PhD) in Social Anthropology at the University of Oxford.

I conducted two research projects with a view to establishing the role of the kimono in modern Japanese society. I interviewed 22 women from a wide range of backgrounds and lifestyle in the Nagoya-Toyota area. My interviewees were all women, typically aged between 50 and 75. My most striking finding was that my interviewees possessed huge collections of kimonos, anywhere between 20 to 200 kimonos and obis. This was because they belonged to the last generation of women whose parents almost invariably supplied them with large bridal trousseaus including sets of kimonos and obis. This custom meant that the average kimono trousseau could cost around 10 million yen.

I also investigated the kimono retail industry, which reached its peak in 1975, with sales of reaching 1.8 trillion yen. Now sales barely reach 2 hundred billion yen. The first shop I approached was a family owned business in central Toyota. The owners have four second-hand kimono shops in addition to their original kimono shop in Gifu. The shop originally opened in 1891, and the family has been in the kimono retail business ever since. The family has since shifted their focus away from new kimonos to second-hand kimonos.

The second shop I investigated had a new strategy focusing primarily on casual kimonos, made from cotton or linen rather than the more formal silk. The owner of this shop hopes to revive the kimono industry. His enthusiasm for the kimono is evident: he and his family wear the kimono everyday (this is relatively rare in the kimono industry) and he does an internet TV broadcast about the kimono every Sunday. He is also the prefectural leader for the nationwide association called Kimono de Jack which holds 6 events a year for kimono lovers to wear kimono. The goal is to provide people with an opportunity to wear the kimono. He and his family readily welcomed me and allowed me to conduct participant observation at their shop on a regular basis.

My methodology was purely qualitative, based on participant observations and interviews, with research on statistics and historical data to supplement my own qualitative data. I used a snowballing method, talking to people and asking for introductions to other potential interviewees and field sites.

My research would not have been possible without the support of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science. I am deeply grateful for the support which made my research possible. I believe that my research is the first of its kind, and it is my hope that my research will bring about a renewed focus on Japanese dress and the urgent need to preserve Japan's unique heritage.

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