The Influence Of Japanese Culture On The Global Fashion Industry

When society recalls the words 'Japanese culture', the first image that pops into our mind is of the kimono. In reality, the historic roots and the philosophical branches of the Japanese culture and traditions spreads far deeper than we believe.

The recognition of Japanese vogue began steadily after the Second World War. During the country's reform period, it surged in terms of architecture, art, fashion and technology, while preserving its historical wisdom of 'wabi sabi' (the art of imperfection). This ancient world view enabled the mid-sized country to establish itself as an innovative powerhouse, one that would eventually take on the world's fashion by storm.

'Kimono' : The traditional Japanese attire

Traversing the fascinating traditional and classical styles of Japan in depth clearly reveals the influence of the kimono on Western aesthetics. In the early seventeenth century, Dutch traders in Japan brought kimonos when they returned back to their homeland, the Netherlands. Initially, the Europeans started admiring the Kimono on the sole purpose of its remarkable lightweightness and comfortability.

The deep-seated connection between the Kimono and Parisian fashion developed concomitantly. Ladies then fell in love with the graceful and exotic draping form of it and initially started wearing the garments for the purpose of relaxation. Fashion icons in Paris and other popular hubs then started to use the kimono material in their own conceptions. Japanese-innovated Kimono designs subsequently came to be used for creation of silk clothing by textile companies in Lyon, marking their entrance into Parisian vogue.

Pioneering fashion designers like Vionnet and Poiret instituted the straight cut construction technique of the kimono which led the early 1920s fashion to be increasingly marked by cylindrical designs composed of straight lines made by sewing together rectangular-shaped pieces. This brought a fresh methodology into the traditional European dressmaking, which was based on the ideals of volume and three-dimensionality. From this period onwards, the structure and shape of dresses changed as designers moved away from obeying the natural human contours and began to embrace the wider scope of a freer range of forms. In this act, the kimono went far beyond the superficial appeal of the exotic and impacted fashion as a whole.

The classical kimono silhouette, with the iconic obi sash, has appeared in various designer collections over the years, in one form or other providing inspiration for fashion resources. It could be debated that only a handful of traditional garments have inspired fashion designers to the degree that the kimono has.

Renowned Japanese brands like Comme des Garcons have brought a scent of innovation and freshness. With striking designs of layers and complicated cuts created from high tailoring techniques, the Japanese designers have no doubt inspired global fashion consumers. What it

clearly transmits is the sense that fashion need not be necessarily gentle, neat or organized; instead, it can be different, innovative or even messy to make the most out of our imagination. Focusing on few; For example Maison Margiela has provided some spectacular samples of the kimono's influence in its 2018 spring/summer men's collection. Similarly, Christian Louboutin had designed a pair of one-of-a-kind boots (inspired by mid 19th century Japanese fashion) for their 2017 autumn/winter collection. It resembled the kimono textile, with bamboo, cranes and plum blossoms. Yves Saint-Lauren, Alexander McQueen and Cristóbal Balenciaga are some popular fashion icons who have explored the creative possibilities of the Japanese kimono. Japanese-inspired styles are even embraced outside of designer brands. Japanese street fashion is witnessing an increasingly popular trend as domestic brands of an international scale with the testimonials of world-class celebrities, such as Kayne West for BAPE and Jay-Z, Pharrell, Lil Wayne, and Jermaine Dupri for A Bathing Ape brand.

Cosplay

On contrary to the more traditional Kimono a relatively contemporary addition to global fashion is cosplay. The term cosplay descends from the words "costume" and play", a term that was constructed by Comic artist, Nobuyuki Takahashi back in the early 1980s. It refers to the norm of wearing costumes of a particular Comic theme or even a specific character. Japanese cosplay is not just popular with teens or young adults but it has proven to be quite popular with people of almost all ages and ethnicities. Its costumes, wigs and other accessories, are always colorful, outrageous, striking or downright strange.

Over the recent years, global cosplay has sprawled itself outside the realm of manga and anime characters and become commonplace, even to events like ComicCon which is in turn derived from themes of American pop culture and Hollywood movies.

Zero Waste fashion

The Japanese nature of designs have a long-standing culture of minimalism, spiritual connection, and no waste. The ancient term 'Mottainai', which is directly linked to Buddhist philosophy, which means 'too good to waste'. This term has been embedded into the roots of their designs and can be witnessed by the gracefulness of Japanese handcrafted objects and even in its people.

The modern Zero-Waste movement was led by Japan born designer Issey Miyake. With his A-POC collection (A Piece of Cloth) in the late 1990s, Miyake minimized waste by making clothes out of a single piece of fabric, so that excess fabric waste wouldn't end up in overcrowded landfills.

A standard garment production process begins with a drawing of the desired garment, a pattern is then generated to achieve this design, subsequently, the pattern pieces are then cut from the cloth, sewn, packed and distributed among retailers. Standard garment production generates on average 15% textile waste due to the stratification of the garment production process.

The waste hierarchy consists of the three 'R's - Reduce, Reuse, Recycle. In order to provide Zero-waste fashion, it eliminates pre-consumer textile waste, while not necessarily addressing waste created during the use life and disposal phase of the garment's life cycle.