

Yosano Akiko and the Poetry of Kimono

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Abstract

In her extensive corpus of essays, *tanka* and prose poems, Yosano Akiko clearly articulates her interest in Heian literature and ancient and modern feminine voices. To consolidate these tropes, Yosano repeatedly used modernity and a certain wit pertaining to her own embodied experience of life.

In the intricate web of these multimodal and multi-layered works, which interweave past and present, interiority and sociality, the kimono emerges as a particularly eloquent motif. It is repeatedly present throughout her career, from her seminal volume of poems *Midaregami* to the Hyakusenkaï exhibition pamphlets published by Takashimaya Department Store. By following these kimono threads, we can see that Akiko delicately yet potently delineates the complexity of the intimate and social meanings of the garment, both for her, the narrator in her poems and her readership.

This article explicates the many references Akiko makes to kimono, through an analysis of specific pieces that effectively combine sentimental and physical experiences, formulating the conceptions of somewhat classic allusive beauty and more modern individuality, of Akiko herself as well as of the subjects she describes. Through this analysis, the importance of fashion, reality effect, comparative analysis and literary dress in the construction and expression of Meiji, Taishō, and early Shōwa femininity is revealed and contextualized.

Introduction

At first glance, Yosano Akiko's body of work seems endless, expanding organically, with thousands of poems in *tanka* and other formats, several diaries and memoirs, numerous opinion columns, magazine essays, and contributions to edited volumes¹. Similar to her famous prose composition *A Rambling Talk (Sozorogoto そぞろごと)*², throughout her whole career she speculated on the incommensurate, the modern as well as the feminine,

¹ For more accounts about the amount she wrote, see UEDA 1983: 83; ROWLEY 2000: 8 and BUCUR 2018: 152. Her *Complete Works (Teihon Yosano Akiko zenshū 定本與謝野晶子全集)*, published between 1979 and 1981, consists of 20 volumes and gives an idea of her extensive production.

² This famous poem, which includes the "women are mountains and the mountains are moving" line, was composed especially for the first issue of the journal *Seitō 青鞞*, published September 1, 1911.

See YOSANO 1911c. For a digital transcript of the poem visit:
https://www.aozora.gr.jp/cards/000885/files/59150_68035.html.

embracing movement, volume and colors, refusing simplification and any reductive interpretations of who she was or who she should be. As she phrased:

私は母性ばかりで生きていない。母性を中心として生きているように見える時も、[...] 私の他の諸性が、ちょうど人が現に見守っている一つの星をめぐって無数の星が群を成しているように回転している。もし私が自分の生活状態にいちいち名をつけるなら無数の名が要るであろう。母性中心、友性中心、妻性中心、労働性中心、芸術性中心、国民性中心...³

I do not live only as a mother. Even when I seem to be focused on motherhood, my other natures are there, too, and they [...] revolve around me and watch over my ego like a myriad of stars clustering around one center. If I were to give a name to each of my living conditions, I would need countless names. Mother, friend, spouse, worker, artist, a woman of the people...

In other words, Akiko's writings touched on a wide variety of material, shedding light on many worlds — intimate or more social — that, in so doing, she interconnected and wove intriguingly rich networks of references that reflected her passions, her interests, her opinions, as well as the cultural codifications she was navigating. Numerous academic studies of her life and work offer detailed accounts of such polarized systems that weave Akiko's intimate, sensory and romantic experiences with her awareness of social standing, conventions, and critical discourse⁴. Interestingly, many studies have come to show, directly or indirectly, that fashion and clothing are at the heart of this dialectic.

For example, by focusing on Akiko's personal and professional history with *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari* 源氏物語)⁵, G.G. Rowley on the one hand emphasized how transformative the experience of reading and later translating Murasaki Shikibu's work was for Akiko, connecting the lonely child to the accomplished scholar, the ancient Heian period fiction to 20th century Japan. On the other hand, Rowley's study indirectly points at how Akiko, closely adapting *Genji's* language, came across episodes where feminine voice was made physically real with the intersection of garments, as either facilitators or prohibitors of what the character wants to convey: joy, wit, or frustration. For example, the passage describing Genji taking advantage of Utsusemi: her surprise and protestation is effectively made inaudible because she is buried under layers of bedclothes⁶.

³ YOSANO 1916a: “母性偏重を排す”. In: 太陽. See also YOSANO/MOROSAWA 2021: 72. All translations are, if not otherwise indicated, by the author.

⁴ It is out of the scope of this article, but RABSON 1991 provides a direct example of such an “ambivalent” writing process with the analysis of how Akiko switched positions between the Russo-Japanese War and the Pacific War (World War II). The article in particular highlights how Akiko's poems are meant to be understood within a certain context, taking into account the balance between personal and national sentiment present in the composition.

⁵ See ROWLEY 2000.

⁶ ROWLEY 2000: 105–108.

Another example that gives further evidence of how the inner and social life of Akiko came to be articulated through clothes, is her Parisian diary⁷. In this regard, one entry is particularly eloquent:

日本服を着て巴里の街を歩くと何処へ行つても見世物の様に人の目が自分に集る。日本服を少しく変へて作ったロオヴは、グラン・ブルヴァルの「サダヤツコ」と云ふ名の店や、巴里の三越と云つてよい大きなマガザンのルウヴルの三階などに陳べられて居るので、然まで珍しくも無いであらうが、白足袋を穿いて草履で歩く足附が野蛮に見えるらしい。自分は芝居へ行くか、特別な人を訪問する時かの外は成るべく洋服を着るやうにして居る。併し未だコルセに慣れないので、洋服を着る事が一つの苦痛である。でも大きな帽を着ることの出来るのは自分が久しい間の望みが達した様に嬉しい気がする。⁸

Whenever I walk around the streets of Paris wearing Japanese clothes, I attract attention as if I were a spectacle. Since slightly altered Japanese ‘robes’ are displayed in stores like the one called ‘Sadayakko’ on the Grand Boulevard and on the third floor of the Grands Magasins du Louvre — which could be called the Mitsukoshi of Paris — I suppose a kimono is not that an unusual garment for people to see. Still, with my *zōri* sandals on, complete with the white *tabi* socks, I seem to look like a surprisingly primitive person.

I try to wear Western clothes as much as possible unless I am going to a play or visit someone special. But since I am still not used to wearing a corset, it is a pain for me to dress in this manner. However, being able to wear a big hat makes me feel so happy, as if I have achieved something I wanted for a long time.

A more direct assertion of Akiko’s constant engagement with clothes as poetic devices can be found in a comprehensive article by Ōkubo Haruno, published in 1999. The author, using a rather mathematical approach, in fact noted that twenty percent of Akiko’s poems in the volume *Clothes of Love* (*Koigoromo* 恋衣) are related to clothing, while only ten percent of the poems composed by her two co-authors, Yamakawa Tomiko and Masuda Masako, concern fashion⁹. Going further, Ōkubo created a pie chart that precisely breaks down the way kimono (and related Japanese outfits) appear in Yosano Akiko’s works. Ōkubo bases her calculation on the 473 poems that explicitly refer to kimono, out of the 10,651 poems published in the *Complete Works*¹⁰. This chart shows that almost fifty percent of the time, the kimono is mentioned metonymically with repeated mentions of the sleeves (*sode* 袖) or the hem (*tsuma* 襖). In twenty-five percent of the instances, the color (*shikisai* 色彩) of the kimono is emphasized, with purple (*murasaki* 紫) and carmine red (*beni* 紅), traditionally considered

⁷ Her Parisian / European travelogues have been translated, albeit partially, in English and in French. See: BEICHMAN 1991; OKADA 2003; DODANE 2008.

⁸ YOSANO 1914a: 204–205.

⁹ ŌKUBO 1999: 79.

¹⁰ *Teihon Yosano Akiko zenshū* 定本與謝野晶子全集 (1979–1981).

youthful and rather passionate colors, appearing most frequently. The following eighteen percent mention dyeing or weaving terms (*senshoku* 染織), and three percent are about visual motifs (*mon'yō* 文様)¹¹. Ōkubo convincingly demonstrates Akiko's deep commitment to conveying both the aesthetic side of kimono and the tangible side, with details embedded in the culture and fashion of the time.

Another eminent and direct example of how Akiko used kimono in her poems has been demonstrated by Omoteda Jirō¹², who unearthed a completely different set of kimono references through his examination of the poems Yosano Akiko published for the different Hyakusenkaï (百選会), kimono and *obi* exhibitions held at Takashimaya Department Stores¹³. Published a year prior to a large retrospective exhibition at the Takashimaya Archives¹⁴, Omoteda's article helps classify and contextualize a few of the 453 *tanka* poems Yosano composed especially for these events¹⁵, over the course of about twenty years, from 1921 (Taishō 10) to 1940 (Shōwa 15). These *tanka* are particularly interesting as they reveal how Akiko came to be surrounded by classy, glamorous, “à la mode” kimono and how motivated she was to contextualize and to advertise them, using her poetic skills. More specifically, Omoteda notes that for Akiko, these poems were a medium, a channel to reach a wider — and indeed female — audience, using her own motivational voice:

女性の社会的地位の向上等を提唱し、独創的で革新的な彼女の進取の精神を、新しい創造を指向する百選会の力にしたかったからであろう。¹⁶

She was an advocate for the improvement of women's social status, and so she wanted her creative, ingenious, and enterprising spirit to be a force for the avant-garde oriented Hyakusenkaï.

¹¹ The remaining seven percent are categorized as “others”. See ŌKUBO 1999: 80.

¹² OMOTEDA 2014.

¹³ Organized and sponsored by Takashimaya Department Store from 1913 until 1994 (held for a total of 183 times), the Hyakusenkaï were promotional kimono and *obi* sale events. Several times a year, typically for the spring and autumn seasons, each event involved the top *wafuku* makers of the time, creating for them the occasion to display the newest innovations in weaving and dyeing artistry while working within specific themes and color palettes. Yosano Akiko was part of the decision committee that created the themes and color guidelines, and she composed original poems based on the pieces presented. The poems were published in booklets distributed during the event, closely interweaving text and image, Akiko's poetic style and her taste in kimono.

¹⁴ See the specific catalogue published for the exhibition: TAKASHIMAYA SHIRYŌKAN 2015. A more recent exhibition held in 2021 under the title *Takashimaya sōgyō 190 shūnen kinenten kimono a ra mōdo* 高島屋創業 190 周年記念展キモノ★ア・ラ・モード also used Yosano Akiko's poetic material to emphasize some sections of the kimono and *obi* display. See also ŌKUBO 2018: 43–56.

¹⁵ It should thus be noted that *tanka* entries composed for Takashimaya are not included in the *Complete Works*.

¹⁶ OMOTEDA 2014: 77.

She also wanted to utilize the reputation and strong network of weavers and dyers Takashimaya had formed to create a new type of kimono “class”:

着用する女性の微妙な心情を汲んだ歌があり、そして瑞々しい景色を染織する工匠の見事さを歌う。¹⁷

There are poems that capture the subtle emotions of the women who wear kimono, and they are about the craftsmanship of the artisans who dye and weave the garments as fresh and youthful sceneries.

Ōkubo and Omoteda’s focused research suggests that Akiko's poetic works in which kimono fashion appears form an original and eloquent ground, as they feature her understanding of the traditional ways of making kimono and her connection with the concrete and somewhat intangible dimensions of kimono design. Moreover, these compositions evoke her desire to showcase new sartorial patterns in kimono dressing, celebrating new modes of kimono consumption — namely buying at department stores — and appreciation, considering kimono not only by looking at bolts of fabric but also by looking at brochures, magazines, photographs etc.

On a more literal level, these kimono poems formulate the idea of words as a sensory interface, as embodied markers of time and as performative signs. These poems and their “real” kimono words participate to what Barthes conceptualized as “reality effect”: they index the real and through this positioning they create an atmosphere, they trace character¹⁸. Clair Hughes describes this dynamic as follows:

References to dress for both reader and writer contribute to the ‘reality effect’: they lend tangibility and visibility to character and context. [...] Dress is a visible aspect of history, a material index of social, moral and historical change [...] Dress is a social code which can be transmitted [...] [and] an author’s employment of dress and its accessories can illuminate the structure of [his / her] text. [...] [Ultimately this leads to new ways of] thinking, feeling and seeing what clothes can mean within a human life, what value they can embody.¹⁹

These various examples demonstrate that Akiko's relationship to clothing is a fascinating one, constantly oscillating between the read and the seen, the written and the lived, and emphasizing the power of allusion and repetition. Mapping the use and the reality of kimono in Yosano Akiko’s work thus leads us to consider an analysis that constantly intersects several axes: a historical one and a thematic one. Acknowledging all the above-mentioned

¹⁷ OMOTEDA 2014: 80.

¹⁸ See BARTHES 1989 [1969]: 141–148.

¹⁹ HUGHES 2006: 4–6.

dimensions, this article discusses specific *tanka* poems Akiko wrote in edited volumes and for the Hyakusenkaï, firstly examining poems that weave together references to classical texts and modern Japanese traditions; secondly, looking at poems that describe kimono-clad women in delicate yet pivotal, transformative, “epoch-making”, stances.

With this polarized scope, I hope to demonstrate how kimono was an integral part of modernity in Japan and could narrate many layers of selfhood contributing to the formation of a more assertive femininity through the Meiji, Taishō and early Shōwa eras.

Part One: Pressing one’s self against the body of traditions

1.1 Heian literary classics

Throughout her career Yosano Akiko maintained a strong interest in classical literature, especially texts and poems from the Heian period (795–1185). As pointed out by Pandey in her analysis of Murasaki Shikibu and Izumi Shikibu’s texts, a certain sense of an embodied selfhood can be conveyed via words. In particular, the ideas of voice and feminine agency can be seen in court narratives using the sleeves and layers of outfits, as words and clothes become the doubly readable interface between one’s body and the world²⁰.

Akiko, as mentioned above, was an expert in such literature and many of her compositions illustrate that she was aware of the power of *honkadōri* (本歌取) allusions and in particular how a reference to kimono tropes can create potent poetic resonances from past to present. More specifically, by tapping into Heian textual productions from a twentieth century point of view, Akiko gives a fresh approach to how a narrator can be distinguished and analyzed, contouring their presence via a juxtaposition of old and new imageries.

It is particularly evident in this poem, where she shows a strong connection to the well-known trope of insects and sleeves:

うすものの二尺のたもとすべりおちて蛍ながるる夜風の青き²¹

usumono no nishaku no tamoto suberiochite hotaru nagaruru yokaze no aoki

From my thin silk gauze summer kimono and its two feet long sleeves,

Gliding fireflies flew away, into the blue evening wind.

Connecting sleeves to nature and transitory, moving landscapes, this poem suggests the fleeting nature of self and forms a romantic composition that closely resembles the following poem by Princess Shikishi²²:

²⁰ See PANDEY 2016: 37.

²¹ YOSANO 1901. See another translation in GOLDSTEIN/SHINODA 1987: *tanka* #33.

²² Shikishi Naishinnō 式子内親王 (1149–1201).

露はさぞ野原篠原分け入れば虫の音さへぞ袖に砕くる
tsuyu wa sazo nohara shinohara wakeireba mushi no ne sae zo sode ni kudakuru
 Dew, yes, as I part the field, bamboo grass field, the voices of insects shatter on my
 sleeves.²³

Nonetheless, there are differences. Princess Shikishi expresses a somewhat rushed, brisk movement, with the voices of insects made explicitly present, while in Akiko's poem the atmosphere feels quieter and slightly more static. Furthermore, Akiko directly mentions the size of the sleeve, something Heian court ladies avoided to do as it was evident that anyone would know the size of a court lady's *ōsode* (大袖) sleeve, an iconic part of any *irokasane* (色襲) outfit²⁴. Thus, for Akiko, *nishaku no tamoto* is a deliberate hint at a certain type of sleeve in order to make it unmistakably modern, suggesting the young age of the speaker, since sleeves of that size (about 60 cm long) in the Meiji era indicated a rather stylish woman in early adulthood. Such length can be seen as an indicator of wealth too, given the fact that such sleeves required more fabric and were naturally more expensive.

Another poem from *Waves of the Blue Ocean* (*Seigaiha* 青海波), a later volume published in 1912, also reflects Akiko's "Heian connection", particularly with Chapter seven of *The Tale of Genji*, "Momiji no Ga", when a *gagaku* dance called *Seigaiha* is performed by Hikaru Genji. Akiko's poem in that volume may be a way to imagine Genji's mesmerizing dance, but the most important aspect is that she orients the rush of feelings through kimono fabrics, joining the invisible (the wind) with the visible (an unlined kimono):

初秋の一重の衣涼やかに風の通るも戀に似るかな²⁵
hatsuaki no hitoe no koromo suzuyakani kaze no tōru mo koi ni niru kana
 Love is like this cool breeze, which goes through the fineness of my kimono, early
 autumn.

This entry in particular can be seen as similar to the witty composition by Izumi Shikibu²⁶, sent to a lover who had stopped his nighttime visits to her:

夏衣きては見えねど我がためにうすき心のあらはなる哉
natsugoromo kite wa mienedo waga tame ni usuki kokoro no arawa naru kana
 You no longer come to visit me in your splendid summer clothes, how transparently
 thin your heart is as well!²⁷

²³ English translation SATO 1993: 62.

²⁴ See NAGASAKI 2020.

²⁵ YOSANO 1912: Poem #421.

²⁶ IZUMI Shikibu 和泉式部 (976?–1030?).

²⁷ HIRSHFIELD/ARATANI 1990: 64.

In both cases, the thin fabrics of the kimono are used in a delicate sensory manner, hinting at the romance experienced by the poetic persona. But Shikibu's tone is ironic, while Akiko's is introspective and dreamy, more optimistic, as autumn breeze often correlates to something nice and enveloping, gently cooling off the person who feels it.

Conversely, Akiko's kimono references can be quite expressive, including hints of distress, as seen here, where the length of the sleeves serves as a metonymy and a metaphor for the depth of lyrical, desperate feelings:

人に侍る大堰（おほみ）の水のおぼしまにわかきうれひの袂の長き
hito ni haberu Ōi no mizu no obashima ni wakaki urei no tamoto no nagaki
 Leaning with him
 Against the railing of our inn
 And looking at the river — O these long long sleeves
 And endless my grief.²⁸

This particular poem can be seen as parallel to one by Princess Shikishi, who also used “deep” sleeves to suggest heavy, distressed feelings:

年月の恋ひも恨みも積もりては昨日に勝る袖の淵かな
toshitsuki no koi mo urami mo tsumorite wa kinō ni masaru sode no fuchi kana
 Love and griefs accumulate in years and months, the abyss in my sleeves is much
 deeper than yesterday.²⁹

In the following example, Akiko demonstrates her fluency in ancient poetic formulations with another “classic kimono” trope that implies touch and robe exchange, evoking a virtual yet sensual embrace between lovers:

ふしませとその間さがりし春の宵衣桁にかけし御袖かつぎぬ
fushimase to sono ma sagarishi haru no yoi ikō ni kakeshi misode katsuginu
 Whispering goodnight
 This spring evening
 And leaving the room
 I take from the rack his kimono and try it on.³⁰

The composition, in many ways, evokes a high level of intimacy: on one hand there is the whispering and on the other, there is the room in which the protagonists were obviously

²⁸ YOSANO 1901. English translation GOLDSTEIN/SHINODA 1987: *tanka* #123.

²⁹ English translation SATO 1993: 69. See also OKUNO 2001.

³⁰ YOSANO 1901. See also SHINCHŌSHA 2000: 23. English translation GOLDSTEIN/SHINODA 1987: *tanka* #21.

undressed, as their respective kimono are hanging on racks. The intimacy resonates further in the line where the female narrator takes pleasure in wrapping herself in her lover's kimono. This sensory and in two ways "touching" moment is, not surprisingly, very much in line with the culture of evocative indirectness prevalent in the Heian period. In Lady Nijō's *Memoirs* (*Towazugatari* 問わず語り)³¹ for example, such use of kimono is described several times, evoking the agreed — or sometimes forced — physical — or sometimes imagined — embraces between Nijō and emperor Go-Fukakusa-tennō.

But the singular practice of a woman dressing in the robes of a male lover could also be seen as a reference to the Nō play *The Well Curb* (*Izutsu* 井筒), which follows the destiny of a woman remembering her dead partner by dressing in his keepsake coat robe (*chōken* 長絹) and lacquered hat³².

1.2 Theatrical classics

In addition to the web of metaphors and signs referring to imperial courtship, femininity and sartorial habits, Akiko used another set of "classics" for her kimono poems: traditional Japanese theater and dance. One poem, again from *Seigaiha*, uses a particularly clear reference to Kabuki, by evoking Onoe Kikunosuke II³³, known for the role of Princess Komachi in the play *The Snowbound Barrier* (*Tsumoru koi yuki no sekinoto* 積恋雪関扉):

菊の助きくの模様のふり袖の肩脱がぬ間に幕となれかし³⁴

Kikunosuke kiku no moyō no furisode no kata nuganu mani maku to narekashi

The curtain falls on the *furisode* adorned with chrysanthemum motifs that Kikunosuke wears before his shoulder is undressed.

This poem uses a set of words that create a double reality effect: the actual name of Kikunosuke and on top of that the chrysanthemum motif that clearly marks the role he incarnated. An *Ukiyo-e* print by Toyohara Kunichika confirms the iconography for that specific persona³⁵ and confirms Kikunosuke as a popular *onnagata* actor. More precisely, it becomes evident that Akiko had the desire to anchor her composition in a dramatic moment of his performance: between the tense expectation to see the "naked shoulder" and the curtain that shuts everything down. Such a dramatic device indirectly hints at the entertaining magic

³¹ See BRAZELL 1976.

³² Play from the fantasy (*mugen* 夢幻) category in the Nō repertoire written by Zeami Motokiyo (1363–1443).

³³ Onoe Kikunosuke II 尾上菊之助二代目 (1868–1897).

³⁴ YOSANO 1912: Poem #8.

³⁵ See Toyohara Kunichika, *Actor Onoe Kikunosuke II in the role of Princess Komachi* [*Tsumoru koi yuki no sekinoto* play] (1897).

of Kabuki that Akiko must have perceived herself while in the audience, specifically here its effective use of the mysterious “do not show but let see” art of *yūgen* (幽玄).

Another reality effect is when figures of dancing girls, arguably Kyōto Maiko³⁶, appear. As Sanford Goldstein mentions, there is a recurrence of Maiko (or at least young girls dancing) in Akiko’s early works, for instance in *Midaregami* and the section titled “The dancing princess” (*Maihime* 舞姫)³⁷. Among the poems in this specific sequence, two in particular can be noted for their use of kimono outfits. The first one, detailed yet abstract gives a rather statuesque account of the dancing figure:

浅黄地に扇ながしの都染九尺のしごき袖よりも長き³⁸

asagiji ni ōgi nagashi no miyakozome kushaku no shigoki sode yori mo nagaki

A pale yellow outfit dyed in Kyōto style with patterns of fans. Long are the sleeves
but the *shigoki* belt of nine *shaku* is even longer.

There is a multitude of details, with a double focus: one being on the torso, hips and back by mentioning how the outfit works with different lengths: the nine-*shaku* length³⁹ of the *shigoki* (志古貴)⁴⁰ hip sash and the length of the sleeves. The length of the *obi* itself is not mentioned, which creates an ambiguity about who is really dancing. If a *shigoki* sash is tied, it is most certainly a young woman. But is she a professional Maiko or a girl from a good house giving a dance recital? The color and the fan motif suggest something high class and conservative, so the girl who is standing here is meant to be on display in her best attire. The scene can further be visualized by looking at *bijinga* (美人画) paintings representing Maiko or girls from wealthy families, such as the ones by Uemura Shōen (上村松園 1875–1949)⁴¹.

³⁶ Maiko (舞妓): Term to designate the young apprentices in the art of Japanese traditional dancing (*Nihon buyō* 日本舞踊) and singing (*Ko-uta* 小唄, *Naga-uta* 長唄, songs accompanied with *shamisen*) to entertain guests at tea houses (*ozashiki* 御座敷 style) or at theaters (*kaburenjō* 歌舞練場 style). Once the young artist has finished her training, she changes status to become a Geiko (芸妓) (outside of Kyōto the term would be Geisha). As a Geiko, the artist stops wearing the long sleeves (*furisode* 振袖) and long *obi* (*darari* だらり) that are iconic of the childlike Maiko look and shifts to more mature attire.

³⁷ See GOLDSTEIN 2004.

³⁸ YOSANO 1901: Poem #304. Another translation can be found in GOLDSTEIN/SHINODA 1987: Poem #126, although that translation seems to mistake the color: “Kimono pale blue a pattern of dancing fans, and her long long waistband longer than her long long sleeves”.

³⁹ One *shaku* (一尺) is about 30 cm, so nine *shaku* (九尺) is about 2.7 m.

⁴⁰ *Shigoki* (志古貴) is a long and narrow sash made of flowy silk that secures the bottom hem of the main *obi* as well as the kimono blousing pleat around the hips. Hanging loose, it is considered as a formal and feminine accessory, especially in the Edo period and Meiji era. Mostly worn nowadays during celebrations (girls for *Shichi-go-san* ceremonies or brides at their weddings).

⁴¹ Examples of Shōen’s paintings include: *Spring Make-up* 春の粧 (1903) [総成カントリー倶楽部], *Three Sisters* 姉妹三人 (1903) [個人所蔵所蔵], *Beauty on a Veranda* 美人之図 (1910) [ウッドワン美術館所蔵], *Beauties in a Snowstorm* 雪吹美人図 (1911) [ウッドワン美術館所蔵].

Overall, this poem shows how an accumulation of fragments and details can result in something that creates ambiguity and the poem's vagueness creates a vibrant and impressionistic effect, which has its advantages. A more musical tone can be felt through these lines too, as the sleeves and the long sash indirectly echo the lyrics from *Gion no ko-uta* (祇園の小唄), the most famous song in the entertainment districts. The song is composed of four paragraphs, juxtaposing Kyōto landmarks (Higashiyama, Daimonji, the Kamogawa river), seasons as well as Maiko's iconic appearance (*furisode* sleeves, red lipstick, and *darari obi*)⁴².

The second "Maiko" poem, from the same section of *Midaregami*, further consolidates the impressionistic, visual, and sensorial atmosphere. Akiko places a painter at the center of the scene, gazing at a colorful dancer, luminous while the weather is gloomy outside:

よそほひし京の子すゑて絹のべて絵の具とく夜を春の雨ふる
yosooishi kyō no ko suete kinu nobete e no gu toku yo o haru no ame furu
 Dissolving colors to paint on taut silk a Kyōto dancing girl in brilliant robes. I hear the
 rain this spring night.⁴³

Whether old or new classics, the references Akiko uses in the above poems all emphasize kimono in an iconic way, a kimono made to hint at love or to incorporate movement and dance, to be looked at within the standards of the prim and proper "feminine" culture of the time, without disrupting any conventions. In parallel to these generally poised and controlled entries, however, Akiko composed more radical poems that explore more bluntly new ways of communicating experiences of a certain "mundus muliebris"⁴⁴ and convey them, unapologetically, to the outside world.

Part Two: Kimono as a marker of modern times and voices

2.1 Personal folds of time

In addition to poems that include strong references to traditional themes, Akiko composed poems that used clothing to sketch her sensitivity to her own times, within her own body and her personal history. She was, for instance, not shy about sharing her past, how she struggled with a kimono that did not fit her identity, how specific outfits were important at

⁴² See more in HUGHES 2008: 135–137.

⁴³ YOSANO 1901: Poem #318. English translation GOLDSTEIN/SHINODA 1987: Poem #134.

⁴⁴ Latin expression evocative of anything belonging to women's "adorned worlds". Here it is particularly interesting to mention Charles Baudelaire's use of the expression as for him it meant to designate the purely feminine sphere of creating beauty and opportunities with pieces of clothing and accessories. See BAUDELAIRE 1885: 96–99.

certain moments in her life, how changes in society were reflected in the colors, patterns, sleeves, accessories or tailoring of the outfits.

For example, in the following poem from the *Spring Thaw Collection* (*Shundeishū* 春泥集), there is the startling revelation that her appearance when she was young was quite boyish and that she was ashamed of it:

十二まで男姿をしてありしわれとは君に知らせずもがな⁴⁵
jūni made otoko sugata o shite arishi ware to wa kimi ni shirasezu mo gana
 So reluctant for you to know that until I was twelve, I was seen like a boy because I
 was dressed like one.

There is a similar poem in the 1914 volume *From Summer into Fall* (*Natsu yori aki e* 夏より秋へ)⁴⁶. The above poem reveals that her tomboy persona was most likely not a deliberate choice, but something forced onto her through clothes. The poem achieves a striking effect: it shows her as a young woman who is willing to truly reveal herself to others, especially to men, yet uses the term *otoko sugata* as an indirect mention of a bizarre, shameful sartorial habit that undermined her feminine identity, her true self. The poem also shows her awareness concerning the issue of veracity in talking as a woman about her femininity. In the same year (1911), she published a piece that indicates her resolution to maintain a certain rectitude between text and reality. It is specifically evident in the passage about sexual drive:

また男子の貞操観を聞きたいものであるが、それは男子自身の正直な告白を待つより外はない。しかし自分の想像では、男子は生理的に女子とよほど異った所があつて、処女には性欲の自発がないにかかわらず、若い男子にはそれが反対に熾であるらしい。[十月の雑誌「三田文学」の谷崎氏の小説はその一例である。]⁴⁷

I would like to hear about boys' views on chastity, but I have no choice but to wait for their own honest confession. However, I imagine that boys are physiologically very different from girls, and that although virgin girls have no spontaneous sexual desire, young boys, on the contrary, do. (Mr. Tanizaki's novel in the October issue of *Mita Bungaku* magazine can be seen as an example of this.)

⁴⁵ YOSANO 1911a: Poem #113. See also ŌKUBO 1999: 80.

⁴⁶ YOSANO 1914b: 106. 物干しへ帆を見に出でし七八歳(ななやつ)の男すがたの我を思ひぬ *mono hoshi e ho o mini ideshi nanayatsu no otoko sugata no ware o omoinu*. I think of myself how I went out to see the sail on the clothesline when I was seven or eight, dressed like a boy. See HAMANA 1968: 17.

⁴⁷ YOSANO 1911b: 私の貞操観. In: 女子文壇. See also YOSANO (edited by KANO 1985): 89.

In this paragraph, which mentions Tanizaki Jun'ichirō's provocative short story, *Hyōfū* (颯風)⁴⁸, Akiko seems to be reinforcing her desire to express her feminine mindset through her own chaste values. The following poem confirms Akiko's tendency to use poetry to assert her opinions on life, gender, and sexuality, confessing herself directly yet shrouding her "truth" in a protective set of virtues. In other words, her poem asserts the idea that it is ultimately virtuous to speak the truth, even as she bluntly reveals herself as an awkward introvert whose body and growth are publicly discussed through a codified change in her kimono:

肩上げをとりて大人になりぬると告げやる文の恥ずかしきかな
kata-age o torite otona ni narinuru to tsugeyaru fumi no hazukashiki kana
 "We've taken out the shoulder tucks, she's a grown-up now" the letter said — and
 oh the shame, I felt, the shame!⁴⁹

This poem centers on the moment when the *kata-age* (肩揚げ) or shoulder tuck, emblematic of children's kimono, is undone because the girl most likely has reached menarche. The life-changing episode is not marked by the gift of a new kimono but the same kimono with the tucks undone, which may seem like a minor adjustment but is a fundamental one because it suddenly shows that the girl has "come of age". With a simple clothing adjustment, something intimate is put on display, and the girl becomes aware that she is not a child anymore, and, ready or not, she must literally shoulder being seen as a woman, prepared for marriage (among other things). The *fumi* (letter) element brings in a parental point of view, hence the shame, but it could also be Akiko pointing at the very poem she is writing, enclosed in a letter addressed to her future husband, her editor, Yosano Tekkan (与謝野鉄幹 1873–1935). Among all the unfolding, Akiko's shame might be the focal point, but she also demonstrates that she is a modern poet, not afraid to use her embodied life experiences to nourish her art.

In the end, the flustered, almost blushing tone may have been an intentional choice, out of respect for herself as well as respect for Tekkan. It may be a response to the particularly composed and calm poem he wrote — and which Akiko regarded highly — about a young male student starting his new school year in Tōkyō, all neatly dressed in the *hakama* (袴) uniform that marks him as a modern *shosei* (書生) student (a student who boards at someone's house in exchange for chores):

⁴⁸ The story depicts a young painter who is drawn into Yoshiwara and then flirts with and sleeps with many women while touring around northern Japan before going back to Tōkyō and his "official" girlfriend. The 1911 October issue of *Mita bungaku* was banned due to *Hyōfū's* explicitness.

⁴⁹ YOSANO 1900. In: *Myōjō* 明星. English translation BEICHMAN 2002: 86.

春浅き道灌山の一つ茶屋に餅くふ書生袴つれたり⁵⁰

haru asaki Dōkan yama no hitotsu chaya ni mochi kuu shosei hakama tsuketari

Spring is coming. A student in *hakama* eats *mochi* cakes, the tea stand on top of Dōkan hill.

These youthful entries should not elide the fact that Akiko can be more confident about who she is and how her body appears, as seen in this poem:

ゆあみして泉を出でし やははだにふるるはつらき人の世のきぬ

yumi shite izumi o ideshi yawa hada ni fururu wa tsuraki hito no yo no kinu

Bathed and warm she rose up from the spring and tender flesh was touched by pain: robe for the human world.⁵¹

This poem contains a reference to the kimono, which once again reveals the body while covering it. Yet it is a sensual corporeality that is sketched, with the body and the self joined in a vertical, celestial correspondence: a pure, angelic body, released from tension, must return to the pressure of dressing for human society⁵². A *haiku* by Sugita Hisajo (杉田久女 1890–1946) using the same pivotal “wrapped silk upon sensitive skin” moment describes the opposite transition and yet offers a similar vision of a body and a spirit present in the same space and enlightened moment, considering what clothes do to a body:

花衣ぬぐや纏はるひもいろいろ⁵³

hanagoromo nugu ya matsuwaru himo iroiro

Taking off the kimono I used during *hanami*
All those different cords coiling around me.

Another poem by Akiko can be mentioned in that regard, as it creates an even more three-dimensional impact. Most interestingly, this entry, for once, does not make the kimono but the *obi* the essential marker of the presented self:

ゆきかへり八幡筋のかがみやの鏡に帯をうつす子なりし⁵⁴

yukikaeri Hachimansuji no kagamiya no kagami ni obi o utsusu ko narishi

Taking a detour and passing along Hachimansuji street, it was me, this girl and this *obi*, my image reflected in the mirrors of the looking glass shop.

⁵⁰ YOSANO 1898. In: *Yomiuri shinbun* 読売新聞.

⁵¹ YOSANO 1900. In: *Myōjō* 明星 and YOSANO 1901. English translation BEICHMAN 2002: 204.

⁵² Mirroring, to some degree, the narrative in the Nō play titled *A Robe of Feathers* (*Hagoromo* 羽衣).

⁵³ SUGITA 1919. In: *Hototogisu* ホトトギス. See also HIROTA 2009.

⁵⁴ YOSANO 1909: Poem #82. See also BEICHMAN 2020: 453–454.

According to Akiko's explanation in the book *Three-hundred Tanka Explanations* (*Tanka sanbyaku kō* 短歌三百講), this poem should be understood as one of her most fashionable ones, as Hachimansuji street was very chic, with modern stores selling kimono as well as cosmetics, embroidered bags, accessories and, most importantly here, full-length mirrors.⁵⁵ It was a street of many wonders, a street where people could easily get excited, enjoying themselves as consumers, as subjects who look at other subjects as well as themselves.

On the one hand this poem feels very modern because of its sense of movement (walking) and the specific setting (a woman on a street) and could be compared to Charles Baudelaire's composition "To a Passerby"⁵⁶ in *Flower of Evil*. On the other hand, the poem feels modern because the full-length mirrors were new fixtures at the time. They allowed women to discover their faces and bodies in a new light, after centuries of seeing themselves only in the limited, fragmented surface of hand mirrors. This poetic assertion of a "totalized" body recognized as belonging to an individual through that very individual's gaze, can be seen as parallel to the mirror scene in Tamura Toshiko's 1913 short story, *The Woman Writer* (*Onna sakusha* 女作者):

The woman writer felt as if she were being pulled by the sleeve, a force unexpectedly calling her attention to something dear to her heart. [...] It was like a glimpse of the soft flow of celadon green peeking out from under the sleeve of a white silk garment [...] [But, frustrated about not being able to effectively write and teased by her husband whose voice is like wooden clogs clattering over stepping stones] The woman writer hopped around the room, kicking the bottom of her kimono, her arms still

⁵⁵ See specifically YOSANO 1916b: 232–233. Beichman translates the explanation as follows: "Shinsaibashi's Hachiman Way: simply hearing the name is enough to quicken the heart of any young girl. By anyone's light, this is the most fashionable street in all of fashionable Ōsaka. Even the sight of the collar makers' shops lined up here summons up the whole of Ōsaka chic, for they are lovelier than the evening clouds or a greenhouse full of flowers. No drab Tsukushi ikat or earth-colored men ōshima fabric for kimono there. Then there are the shops selling cosmetics, the handbag stores with their glittering gold embroidery, and two or three mirror stores. Most of the mirrors are full-length, three-feet and two-feet high, but they have many other sizes on display too, and the very smallest can be tucked neatly into one's *obi*. Confident men and women who feel they really belong in Ōsaka like to peek into a mirror for a glimpse of themselves as they pass by. When I reminisce about myself, I always remember how I smiled at the fancy knot of my *obi* in the mirror store as I came and went on Hachiman Way." (BEICHMAN 2020: 453–454).

⁵⁶ English translation SCOTT 1909: "To a Passerby. Around me thundered the deafening noise of the street, In mourning apparel, portraying majestic distress, With queenly ringers, just lifting the hem of her dress, A stately woman passed by with hurrying feet. Agile and noble, with limbs of perfect poise. Ah, how I drank, thrilled through like a Being insane, In her look, a dark sky, from whence springs forth the hurricane, There lay but the sweetness that charms, and the joy that destroys. A flash — then the night... O loveliness fugitive! Whose glance has so suddenly caused me again to live, Shall I not see you again till this life is o'er! Elsewhere, far away... too late, perhaps never more, For I know not whither you fly, nor you, where I go, O soul that I would have loved, and *that* you know!"

tucked in the sleeves. The tears at the edges of her eyes were cold. As she hopped about passing back and forth in front of the full-length mirror, she caught a glimpse of herself, looking like a flying shuttlecock. She continued for a while, enjoying the colors at the tip of the skirt dancing around her feet, but the fun was soon taken over by an impulse to be petulant, to torment someone.⁵⁷

Another poem that uses a kimono as an intimate marker of modern time is the one Akiko composed on her formal entry into adulthood, when officially turning twenty years old:

わが二十秋の朝に 紅なしの友禪著るはさびしきものを⁵⁸
waga hatachi aki no ashita ni beni nashi no yūzen kiru wa sabishiki mono o
 In this autumn morning when I now turn twenty, how sad to put on a *yūzen* kimono
 without any red tints in it.

A sense of time passing and nostalgia is strongly evoked, similar to another of Sugita Hisajo's *haiku*:

春やむかしむらさきあせぬ袷見よ⁵⁹
haru ya mukashi murasaki asenu awase miyo
 Looking at this lined *awase* kimono, its purple color still so intense, reminds me of
 this springtime from a bygone age.

The purple and reddish colors were closely associated with girlhood. Becoming an adult meant saying goodbye to a type of kimono that could not be worn anymore, not because it was worn out, too small or old-fashioned, but just because the colors were not suitable for a grown-up. The poets describe the kimonos with the terms *yūzen* (友禪) and *awase* (袷), implying that the kimonos were high-quality, well-made garments, and thereby underline the regretful melancholy the speakers feel at no longer being able to wear these good kimono⁶⁰.

An intimate change is linked to a kimono — parting from it and/or parting from the self that goes with it — and forms a pattern that weaves a series of personal revelations that makes the reader sympathetic to the author/narrator of the poem. Other poems by Akiko, particularly the ones she was commissioned to write for Hyakusenkaï, reach for something

⁵⁷ TANAKA 1987: 12–14. See also YOSHIO 2014: 226–227.

⁵⁸ YOSANO 1911a: Poem #236.

⁵⁹ SUGITA 1936. In: *Hototogisu* ホトトギス.

⁶⁰ *Yūzen* refers to one of the most intricate ways of dyeing a kimono, using a variety of hand-drawn and reserve/negative space designs. *Awase* refers to a lined kimono worn from October to May. It is warm and comfortable, and it is usually considered a durable garment, as opposed to summer *yukata* (浴衣) or *hitoe* (単衣) unlined kimono, which are more prone to wear and tear.

more universal, engaging the body and the mind of the reader/consumer as she positions herself as a poet/curator.

2.2 Branding the Hyakusenkaï

As mentioned in the introduction, Akiko was inspired to work with the artisans and creative directors of the Hyakusenkaï events because it was a way for her to reach an audience of progressive and fashionable women. She could encourage them to be sensitive to the quality of their kimono and be aware of the historical and technical aspects of it. Akiko challenged herself to write within a set of given parameters, exposing the subtle through an increasingly complex compositional template. In fact, for every Spring, Summer or Fall edition of Hyakusenkaï, there was an imposed theme and color for the kimono and obi designers. As a result, Akiko composed poems that were related to the actual kimono or *obi* pieces that were made according to very specific guidelines, and her words had to fit them.

The 1924 spring edition had the theme “New Bird-and-Flower Patterns”⁶¹, with two options: “designs hinting at Momoyama period outfits”⁶² and “designs combining line and color potency in order to create crisp motifs of birds and flowers”⁶³. The colors were: Yamato purple, peacock green, and sunrise red. Akiko’s poem describes a kimono that most likely followed the “potency” theme and used peacock green. It in fact transcended the parameters of the theme to compose a flying metaphor that creates a magical parallel between women and birds:

今年より孔雀の鳥の緑をば人の少女も翅にすと聞く⁶⁴

kotoshi yori kujaku no tori no midori o ba hito no otome mo hane ni su to kiku

I hear this year the green of peacock feathers will be the green on maidens’ wings.

Another example is from the fall edition of 1931, with a poem focused on *obi* belts produced according to the designated theme of “Gobelin”, referring to an eighteenth-century French tapestry weaving technique, itself derived from what was developed in the fifteenth century by the dyer and weaver Jean Gobelin⁶⁵:

⁶¹ *shinkō kachō moyō* 新興花鳥模様.

⁶² *Momoyama jidai no fukushoku ni hinto* 桃山時代の服飾にヒント.

⁶³ *sen to shikisai ni yoru chikarazuyoi kachō moyō* 線と色彩による力強い花鳥模様.

⁶⁴ 23rd Hyakusenkaï (Spring) 第二回春の百選会 (1924). See TAKASHIMAYA SHIRYŌKAN 2015: 29.

⁶⁵ Jean (or Jehan) Gobelin (c.1410–1476) helped established the use of scarlet dye in France as well as creating high-quality tapestry that boomed under the reign of Louis XIV (17th century). The tapestry technique is now known as Gobelin’s tapestry. Discontinued after the French Revolution, production resumed in 1826 and has continued ever since. At the time of the Hyakusenkaï, it was a relatively recently renewed technique that was used to make the *obi* Akiko describes in her poem.

そのむかしジャン・ゴブランの織り出でて今入る秋の帯の好みに⁶⁶

sono mukashi jan goburan no ori idete ima iru aki no obi no konomi ni

This coming autumn, *obi* belts made in Jean Gobelin's traditional weaving style are the favorite "idées".

The poem fits the curated *obi* theme, using Gobelin's name explicitly, which can create a certain awkwardness. A movement is nonetheless perceptible, as the poem's flow cushions the name of the Gobelin weaving technique with two time markers, *mukashi* (long ago) and *ima iru aki* (this coming autumn), and the poem finishes with a note about the driving force of taste or *konomi* (favorites, favored ideas).

The 1929 spring edition includes an operatic yet abstract poem. This poem places the kimono at the center, a vantage point from which ideas and orientations can radiate outward, capturing the mood of the time, with its various novelties and new forms of beauty. The poem shows how intricate kimono, imagination and words have become, how kimono outfits, deemed traditional, now convey modern ideas as well as updated symbolic meanings:

香ぐはしき近代の詩の面影を装ひとせん明眸乃ため⁶⁷

kaguwashiki kindai no shi no omokage o yosooi to sen meibō no tame

To dress oneself with the lines of a poem grasping the modern flair of our times and reach a radiant and new beauty.

This poem appeared on the poster for the event⁶⁸, placed next to a *bijinga* painting by Kitano Tsunetomi (北野恒富 1880–1947) depicting a lady exposing her left breast in a sensual movement, done with the very kimono upon which Akiko based her composition. This demonstrates the prominent place Akiko had in the Hyakusenkaikai committee, as well as the way Takashimaya publicized the event, disseminating kimono beauty via text and images of inspiring modern ladies, which could in turn inspire real women to come and directly experience these new takes on kimono and its newly tailored taste.

Another poem goes back to a more concrete bodily sensation, simply and yet effectively connected to anyone interested in kimono, specifically any modern consumer of kimono, since kimonos were then being produced at an increasingly rapid pace, with new colors and motifs suitable for the rapidly evolving society⁶⁹. The kimonos that appeared on the posters, in the pamphlets, in the galleries and in the poems of the Hyakusenkaikai were more than

⁶⁶ 42nd Hyakusenkaikai (Fall) 第四二回秋の百選会 (1931). See TAKASHIMAYA SHIRYŌKAN 2015: 70.

⁶⁷ 34th Hyakusenkaikai (Spring) 34 回春の百選會 (1929). See TAKASHIMAYA SHIRYŌKAN 2015: 55.

⁶⁸ Also referred as *Kimono Ōsaka shunki daitenrankai posuta* キモノ大阪春季大展覧会ポスター.

⁶⁹ For the historical and social development of department stores and the impact of the Hyakusenkaikai, see AOKI 2004.

conventional commodities, rather, they excited the viewer, appealing to the impulsive new habit of buying things in a heartbeat:

美しきうすもの季の近づくときめかざらん心あらめや⁷⁰

utsukushiki usumono no ki no chikazuku ni tokimekazaran kokoro arameya

The heart goes faster when one feels summer is approaching and all these beautiful seasonal kimonos are going to be available.

This *tanka* compares interestingly to one written forty years earlier by Yamakawa Tomiko (山川登美子 1879–1909), whose heartbeat quickened when in contact with a certain kimono, not because she was about to purchase it at a department store but because she would soon wear it for her conventionally arranged wedding:

わが胸のみだれやすきに針もあてずましろききぬをかづきて泣きぬ

waga mune no midareyasuki ni hari mo atezu mashiroki kinu o kazukite nakinu

My heart grows wild so easily, before the needle can begin, I put the pure white robe over my head and weep.⁷¹

Comparing the two poems shows how times had changed: in 1939, Akiko uses a pounding heart to suggest a light and enthusiastic feeling; in 1901, Yamakawa Tomiko describes being stuck in a womanhood that wraps her in tears and frustration.

Ultimately, the Hyakusenkaï poems and the personal poems discussed in this second part can be seen as related because they all address the idea of self-awareness and, in a sense, power through the kimono and/or *obi* belt that frames (or opens them) to the readers. In other words, the poems in this section all reveal a voice that knows how to talk about personal style, how to own one's way of dressing as a source of sensual pleasure, cultural delight, and agency. Therefore, these compositions — unlike the "old" ones, which were more intellectual and serene — appealed to the militant side of Akiko and her readers, delineating contours for women to navigate in a society that remained difficult for them, dominated not only by men but now also by consumerism.

Akiko herself expressed caution in the prose poem *Women are plunderers* (*Onna wa ryakudatsusha* 女は掠奪者):

大百貨店の売出しはどの女の心をも誘惑る。

祭りよりも祝よりも誘惑る。

一生涯、異性に心引かれぬ女はある、子を生まうとしない女はある、芝居を、音楽を、茶を、小説を、歌を好まぬ女はある、凡そ何処にあらう、三越と白木屋の売出しと聞いて、胸を跳らさない女が、俄かに誇大妄想家とならない女が。[...] お前は娘として、その華麗な服

⁷⁰ *Natsu Hyakusenkaï graph* 夏の百選會グラフ (05.1939). See TAKASHIMAYA SHIRYŌKAN 2015: 112.

⁷¹ YAMAKAWA 1901. In: *Myōjō* 明星. English translation BEICHMAN 2002: 149.

装に匹敵するどんな気高い愛を持ち、どんなに聡明な理想を持って、世界の青年男子に尊敬され得るか。⁷²

Sales in department stores seduce women's hearts more surely than festivals or other celebratory ceremonies. Some women never have any desire for the opposite sex. Some will not give birth. Some don't like theater, tea, music, novels or poetry. But the very moment when sales are announced at Mitsukoshi or Shirokiya, where is the woman who can contain her enthusiasm? [...] If you have no love nor wisdom regarding your luxurious garments, how do you want to have the young men of the world, wherever they come from, to respect you?

With her characteristic thought-provoking directness, Yosano Akiko is, one more time, using dress and dressing awareness as a sounding board for all the women (herself included) who want to see progress on issues that matter to them as well as places for them to be seen, not only as authors, girls, maidens, mothers or widows but also as women, as complex and tricky as the concept of femininity is.

Conclusion

While Yosano Akiko's corpus at first seems impossibly vast and eclectic, with the kimono angle and the "reality effect" lens, it is possible to effectively approach it and produce a topical analysis. Using comparative analysis, the poems reveal a varied landscape of feelings: delicate, witty, spirited or uplifting, sometimes desperate. The poems discussed in Part One refer, directly or indirectly, to such feelings via ancient tropes. The more personal poems as well as the poems commissioned for Hyakusenkaï, discussed in Part Two, also bear such feelings with the extra quality of having time chiseled within their lines. All ultimately lead the readers into a literary landscape where kimono references create a multitude of echoes that hook the readers and lead them to consider new paths to comprehend the reality enclosed in the act of dressing and writing oneself.

This way, Yosano Akiko's poems that employ kimono, *obi* and *wafuku* (和服) accessories can be further studied in comparison with her prose texts, such as her critical writings and memoirs. Several of her essays display her fashion sense, and some essays articulate her feelings and ideas via clothing. For instance, in the 1919 edited volume *Going through Turbulent Times (Gekidō no naka o yuku 激動の中を行く)*, she addresses several times the importance of clothing. In one case, she uses the famous Chinese expression, attributed to Confucius (孔子): "When people are well fed and clothed they can distinguish between honor

⁷² YOSANO (16.12.1917): 女は掠奪者. In: *Yokohama bōeki shinbun* 横浜貿易新報. Another translation can be found in HAMILL/MATSUI GIBSON 1996: 111–115.

and shame” (*ishoku tarite reishetsu o shiru* 衣食足りて礼節を知る)⁷³. She values access to clothing as the *sine qua non* for an independent human life, as necessary as food and shelter. She completes her thought with remarks about how weavers and shoemakers are essential in any human society⁷⁴. In a later chapter in the same volume, titled “Architecture and Clothes” (*Kenchiku to ifuku* 建築と衣服)⁷⁵, she ponders whether different types of dwellings (Japanese *tatami* houses vs. Western housing) should impact the way people dress or vice versa, demonstrating her engagement in thinking about how concrete changes affect people’s lives and by extension their sense of self and individuality.

Her one-page contribution to the magazine *Fujin gahō* (婦人画報), titled “Make-up done after beauty and aesthetic consciousness is understood” (*Bi no ishiki kara suru o-keshō* 美の意識からするお化粧) is another text in which she reflects upon the concrete impact of Western culture on Japanese ways of living and dressing. For example, considering the differences in movement (walking span) and silhouettes, she writes:

洋服の美しさは曲線の美にあって、これは薄い爲に身體(からだ)にぴったり合って肉體(にくたい)の曲線を現はす事の出来るためです。和服は幾枚(いくまい)も重ねるために、線が消えてしまひます。⁷⁶

The beauty of Western clothing lies in the beauty of the curves it reveals, and this is because it is thin, so it sits on the body perfectly and shows the contours of the body. In kimono, such lines tend to disappear because of the different layers.

Velvet coats were in vogue at the time, and Akiko mentions them in a more nuanced light. She says that they are certainly pretty, but they create an odd shape when worn on top of kimono. They are a bit thick and distort the kimono neckline.

In 1929, in another short piece titled “Unsightly outfits” (*Mikurushiki fukusō* 見苦しき服装)⁷⁷ she expresses more directly her concerns about and even dislike for certain trends in kimono fashion, consolidating her position as a fashion expert and critic. The tone is not unlike Sei Shōnagon in *The Pillow Book*⁷⁸, as Akiko deplures how people, especially young

⁷³ Other common translations are available such as: “Well bred, well fed” or “Decorum can only stand when a person is fed and clothed”. Most importantly, Akiko’s choice of this reference indicates that she might have been familiar with the *Guanzi* (管子) encyclopedia, especially the *Bokumin* volume (牧民篇), and thereby further demonstrates that she is concerned not only with aesthetic theory but also with the concrete aspects of artisanal production.

⁷⁴ Yosano Akiko mentions Confucius along with Aristotle and Socrates in her chapter titled “生活の消極主義を排す”. In: 激動の中を行く. See the passage in either of these volumes YOSANO 1919: 70; YOSANO/MOROSAWA 2021: 208.

⁷⁵ YOSANO 1919: 94–99. See also: 与謝野 晶子 1980 第 17 卷: 評論・感想集 (4): 249–252.

⁷⁶ YOSANO 1925: 7.

⁷⁷ YOSANO 1931: 198–199.

⁷⁸ See MORRIS 1991.

women, do not pay attention to details anymore and get sloppy with the way they put their kimono on and how the kimono is arranged, noting with shock how they let the under-kimono layers peek out and nobody seems to care.

In the memoirs category, the one titled *My Upbringing (Watashi no oitachi 私の生い立ち)*⁷⁹, is quite eloquent and indicates one reason why Akiko, later in life, became so strongly attached to experimenting with colorful, classy, and eye-catching kimono. Basically, she did so because the clothes that she had to wear when she was young gave her an old-fashioned look, creating for her internal struggles and a sense of shame, especially because her classmates bullied her about her clothes:

学校へ行く私が、黒繻子の襟の懸った、茶色地に白の筋違い雨と紅の鳶の模様のある絹縮の袴纏が嫌いでしたらう。芝居で与一平などと云うお爺さん役の着ていますあの茶色と一所の茶なんですものね。[...] で袴纏の絹縮はその頃から二十年くらい前に織られて染められて呉服屋の店へ出されたものであろうと今から思えば思われます。私はこの袴纏を二冬ほど着ていたように思います。私はこの時分ほど同級生にいじめられたことはありません。⁸⁰

A *chijimi* silk *hanten* jacket dyed with white streaks of rain and dark *kurenai* red ivy pattern on a tawny background, with a black satin collar stitched to it, was one of the things I wore to school that I hated. It was the same brown color as the one used for old men in plays like *Yoichibei*. [...] In retrospect, the silk for this *hanten* must have been woven and dyed about twenty years prior, and then sold through a kimono retail store. I think I wore this *hanten* for about two winters in a row. I have never been so bullied by my classmates as I was at that time.

With these longer and more detailed additions, looking at how the kimono worked for Yosano Akiko (and how she incorporated kimono into her poems and other writings) reveals not only where she was heading but also where she was coming from. And this dynamic applies not only to her but to any kimono enthusiast who lived in ancient or modern Japan, as mentioned throughout this article: Princess Shikishi, Izumi Shikibu, Lady Nijō, Yamakawa Tomiko, Sugita Hisajo or Tamura Toshiko.

With kimono as an angle for literary interpretation and comparison, we can also think about Tanizaki Jun'ichirō (谷崎潤一郎 1886–1965), Hayashi Fumiko (林芙美子 1903–1951), Uno Chiyo (宇野千代 1897–1996) or Kōda Aya (幸田文 1904–1990), as their stories involving kimono pursue further what Yosano Akiko had established, proposing new visions of women via the transformative powers of kimono.

⁷⁹ Published originally in the magazine *The New Girl (Shin shōjo 新少女)* in 1915 between April and December.

⁸⁰ YOSANO 2018 [1915]: 11–12.

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