

Crit Sum: (CCC pg. 28-29 Bib 21)
Kimono and the Construction of Gendered and Cultural Identities

Goldstein-Gidoni, Ofra. (1999) Kimono and the Construction of Gendered and Cultural. *Ethnology*, 38(4): 351-370.

Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni from the Tel-Aviv University wrote an article titled “Kimono and the Construction of Gendered and Cultural Identities.” Below is a brief summary of her article.

During the Meiji period (1868-1912), the Japanese government made a goal to become westernized (like America) in appearance. However, it was not until after WWII that westernized cultural traditions began to quickly infiltrate into Japan. These western traditions began to overwhelm the Japanese culture. In order to maintain part of their cultural heritage, the Japanese began to use kimono only as a national costume and symbol. Women began to wear kimonos for special events such as weddings, funerals, and for the coming of age ceremonies. These women were supposed to represent the models of traditional “Japaneseness” and uphold the perfect Japanese women’s motto of *good wife, wise mother* (Goldstein-Gidoni 1999:352).

The coming of age ceremony is a ceremony for both men and women which is held to celebrate their legal majority at age 20. Japan holds a national holiday on January 15 every year to celebrate for those who will be 20 during the year. There are required costumes for the celebration: the men who are coming of age wear black western suits; the women wear the kimono.

The kimono is a very special costume that is worn to celebrate a woman’s beauty during her time of coming of age. In order to properly wear the kimono and have the perfect cylindrical shape, the help of experts is needed to teach classes to women. These classes show them the proper way to dress in the kimono, the proper hair and makeup for the kimono, and the proper kimono etiquette. The cost of the kimono and all of its preparations equals about \$10,000 (US). Being able to properly present your daughter in a kimono has become a prestigious symbol to parents. Parents who cannot afford to have their daughters attired in the kimono on January 15th will not attend the ceremonies because of the shame of not being able to properly present their daughter to society.

The kimono has become a female’s “model of modern traditional Japanese femininity,” which is very different from the Japanese male’s “model of western rationality” (Goldstein-Gidoni 1999:366-367). While a girl wears the kimono, she becomes that perfect piece of Japanese tradition, beauty, and the fantasy which is desired by all. In the kimono, the girl becomes the *good wife, wise mother*.

(This paper was taken from a summary written by JeriAnn Lukens a student at USU)