

## Slow Fashion Concept Upcycled Kimonos as Recycle-oriented Cultural Sustainability

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How can cultural practice help sustainability? UNESCO sets various sustainable development goals targeted by 2020. One of the goals focuses on culture as “a resource for sustainable consumption and production patterns” (UNESCO 2017, p. 16). Lately, slow fashion has become a popular concept among consumers and professionals. Slow fashion refers to “slow down the fashion cycle via a combination of slow production and consumption” (Jung & Jin, 2014, p. 511). Because sources are finite, slow fashion practices can benefit and connected to sustainable development. One way to utilize slow fashion is to recycle materials, which reduces waste and consumption. In Japan, kimono and other Japanese-style clothing have been marginalized from daily usage in contemporary society (Assmann, 2008) since the rapid adaptation of western clothing after the postwar. Today, Japanese people only wear kimonos to formal events, such as weddings and graduations (Valk, 2018). Reproducing new clothes by recycling kimono is *upcycling*. The purpose of the study is to examine the kimono upcycle practice in the young generation in Japan.

A kimono recycling practice has been popular in Japan due to the scarcity of fiber production and supply after World War II (Ogata, 2013) when western clothing was introduced and became popular. The individual households still have large quantities of high-quality silk kimono materials in their closet. These stored kimonos have been sold at second-hand kimono shops, which became popular in the late twentieth century (Valk, 2018). Today, kimonos and Obi (sashes) are used to reinvent fashionable accessories, such as scarves, gloves, shoes, and handbags (Assmann, 2008; Valk, 2008). The idea of upcycling kimono refers to transforming old garments into new and stylish garments and accessories. This upcycling idea links to the cultural behaviors of Japanese people. The expression using the Japanese word, *mottainai* (wasteful), illustrates the motivation behind Japanese people's behavior. Nobel Peace Prize winner in 2004, Dr. Wangari Muta Maathai of Kenya, has promoted the concept of *mottainai*, which incorporates 3Rs: reduce, reuse, and recycle (Wangari, 2011). Recycle-oriented cultural sustainable development is neither a burden nor negatively affects the environment.

Ecological and sustainable ideas have inherently been present in kimono culture within the Japanese lifestyle (Okazaki, 2015). Production of kimonos intends to avoid any waste and to sew

by hand. When kimonos are recycled, the seams can be easily removed because they are originally sewn by a hand. All panels are able to return to kimono's original rectangle flat pieces, which can be recycled into any western clothing. When laying out kimono panels and western dresses side by side, interestingly enough, both the kimono and the basic western dress pattern layout come out to the same length in yardage (Yanagisawa, Ishida, Ito, Ishige, & Watanabe, 1971).

In this study, UNESCO's sustainable development is used as a theoretical framework. Two research questions are formulated. 1. What is the awareness of college students in a Japanese university regarding recycling practices of using kimonos? 2. What are the challenges implementing upcycled kimonos in their daily practices? The research uses a mixed-method approach. The participants were 155 college students in liberal arts at a national Women's University. Their age ranges were from 18 to 25 years old. The self-reported questionnaires, which consist of dichotomous and open-end questions, were collected in June 2019. For the data analysis, a binomial regression method was used for the quantitative analysis, and an open coding method was used in the transcriptions to examine the frequency. Counting frequent words and phrases was the purpose of finding patterns and common themes.

The findings showed that students interested in upcycling kimonos were moderately correlated to those interested in upcycling western garments ( $-0.616$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ; Chi-square:  $58.466$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). Students who were interested in kimono upcycling were less likely interested in western garment upcycling. In the parameter estimates, only the relationship between *Interested in Kimono upcycle* and *Interested in Western garment upcycle* was significant. Other variables, major distinction, age, class level, neither explained their interests of upcycling kimonos nor their experiences upcycling. The college students in Japan were less likely to upcycle kimonos than western garments. The reasons for the challenge were explored by the open-end questions. Six themes were obtained: skills and techniques, awareness, routes of obtaining kimonos, the strength of the old kimono, hygiene, and cost and time. Some students pointed out if the old kimono material is strong enough to remake into a new garment. Others explained the challenge is how to spread the kimono upcycle practice to all the generations.

The results indicated that various students pointed at technical matters. The major challenge was to have the ability to remake new garments and accessories. The findings cannot be generalized as whole college students in Japan and elsewhere. Different age groups may lead to different results. Compared to different generations, a younger generation does not possess many kimonos, which may have affected their interest in upcycling kimonos. Japanese people have a characteristically recycle-oriented culture. Therefore, upcycling kimono could become the next

leading recycled-oriented sustainable practice among Japanese people when the major challenges were resolved. However, further investigation is needed for this cultural trait among younger generations.

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