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# Gender, Citizenship, and Dress in Modernizing Japan

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## CHAPTER

# 5

# GENDER, CITIZENSHIP AND DRESS IN MODERNIZING JAPAN

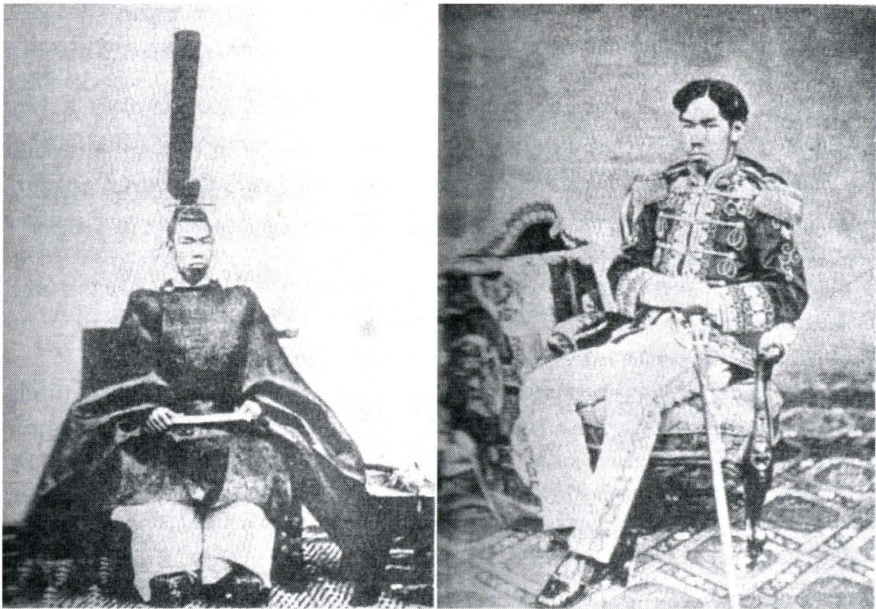
BARBARA MOLONY

Between the 1870s and 1945, dress was one of the signifiers of Japan's transition from being objectified as an "Oriental" country subordinate to the West to playing a dominant role as the bearer of "universal" (Western) modernity to East Asia.<sup>1</sup> In the late nineteenth century, Western dress indicated a yearning for international respect for Japan's modernity; by the early twentieth century, when Japan had largely achieved diplomatic equality with the West and colonial dominion over parts of Asia, Western dress had come to be taken for granted by "modern" Japanese men. In some cases, colonial subjects could be distinguished by their "traditional" clothing and bodily adornment, although this "traditional" dress was likely to be part of an invented tradition encouraged by Japanese anthropologists to distinguish quaint and backward natives from modern colonists. Ethnic considerations cannot be unbundled from those of gender, as modernity was projected by masculine Japanese in Western dress. Modernity and imperialism toward the rest of Asia and modernity and *anti-imperialism vis-à-vis* the West were, thus, linked through dress.

In the early 1920s, some feminists seeking rights of citizenship identified Western clothing with those rights held only by Japanese men, who had for several decades worn Western clothing in the public (political) sphere. Feminists such as Ichikawa Fusae and Hiratsuka Raichō thus adopted Western clothing both for its practicality and because it signified a type of modernity that included women's subjectivity and full citizenship. To be sure, women's choices in dress carried a variety of messages; by the late 1920s Western dress for women had come to be seen as fashionably modern (and not necessarily politicized), and many women's rights activists were equally comfortable in Japanese and Western garb. The gendered shifts in dress did not follow a single trajectory, although dress always marked constructions of gender, class,

status and ethnicity in Japan and its empire, expanding the important notion that the history of changes in dress is a “history itself of shifting patterns of genderization”.<sup>2</sup>

The wearing of Western styles of dress had meanings in addition to modernity and nationality/citizenship. In the late nineteenth century, Western-based dress was used to project (a gendered notion of) Japanese power. Thus, the new military adopted Western-style uniforms shortly after the Meiji Restoration as it constructed a new Japanese masculinity. Samurai hair styles and clothing were soundly defeated with the government army’s victory over samurai rebels in the late 1870s. The Meiji emperor made a famous transition in his public representation from Japanese high nobility to Western manliness by changing his dress, hair and posture (see figure 5.1). The empress attempted to transform the image of femininity by wearing Western gowns. Her practice served as a model for elite ladies to dress in a “modern” way to persuade Western diplomats that Japan deserved to be freed from its unequal treaties with Western nations. At the same time, female factory workers were put in Western clothing because long kimono sleeves could become entangled in industrial machinery. Except for farm women, who had always had an



**Figure 5.1** The young Meiji emperor was photographed in the centuries-old dress of the high court nobility in 1872. By the following year, his public representations shifted to clothing that could be read as typical of modern, manly monarchs in Europe. Photographs in the public domain.

indigenous form of comfortable work clothes and adopted only bits and pieces of Western attire (e.g. aprons and cloth bonnets), women at the top and bottom ends of the social scale had political and pragmatic reasons to wear Western clothing in the late nineteenth century.

By the 1920s, some middle-class feminists adopted gendered Western clothing to indicate that they deserved rights enjoyed by men. Later, government regulations restricted gendered clothing; in the early years of World War II, women were told to wear *monpe* (work trousers) instead of the feminine kimonos that were deemed too frivolous. Thus, both individuals bent on making political statements about the nation, gender and power, and governments attempting to dictate those statements created a modern discourse of dress. Social historians Barbara Burman and Carole Turbin suggest that “Historians of dress and textiles have learned to mine the meaning of material objects, visual and tactile culture, not as a substitute for verbal sources when these are unavailable, but in order to reveal dimensions of political and social transformations that cannot be discerned in observed social behaviours or verbal and written articulations”.<sup>3</sup> The choices of dress by men and women, the creation of preferred dress styles by government officials and those who wished to participate in government or the public sector, the reification through clothing of modernity and backwardness in colonial contexts, and the signalling of possession of “rights” through dress are important dimensions of Japan’s political and social transformations.

### **Dress as an indicator of public service in the pre-modern era**

Dress was an important signifier of status long before it was connected to modernity in the late nineteenth century. While gender is a significant category marked by modern dress (perhaps the most significant), it was but one characteristic signified by clothing in Japan’s classical era (the seventh to twelfth centuries). Indeed, in that period, clothes were most often viewed as markers of class or status.<sup>4</sup> Robes and trousers were worn by men and women alike. All wore loose clothing, and outer- and undergarments were frequently exchanged and worn by aristocratic lovers as a sign of intimacy.<sup>5</sup> Women’s unfettered body-length hair and men’s very tall hats (which men appear to have kept on even while engaged in love-making, according to extant illustrations) were more common signifiers of gender dichotomy than were robes or trousers among the aristocrats of the classical era.<sup>6</sup> Servants of the imperial family, from lowly assistants to high-ranking bureaucrats, wore trousers called *bakama*. Wearing *bakama* had a two-fold role, signifying service to the emperor, on the one hand, and superiority to commoners toiling in the field,



on the other.<sup>7</sup> Male courtiers wore *bakama* from the sixth century, as trousers were the norm for courtiers in China's Sui and Tang dynasties and Japan's court wished to show it had adopted an (up-to-date) international style for its own courtiers. But the *bakama* was by no means exclusively identified with masculinity; it was, rather, a professional bureaucrat's or courtier's garment. Indeed, women courtiers were required to wear *bakama* from the eighth century on. Over the succeeding centuries, men and women alternately donned *bakama*, and although the colours and draw strings were varied – and often differed according to the gender of the wearer – these variations were not static but changed over time. Despite the slight sexual dimorphisms, the same garment was worn by both men and women to differentiate those in courtly or other forms of service from those who worked as labourers or farmers for their families' well being. Other sartorial gender dimorphisms and similarities emerged over the next millennium. It was only with Japan's tidal wave of contact with the West in the late nineteenth century, however, that dress came to be the nexus of gender, power, ethnicity, imperialism and modernity.

### **Masculinity, modernity and the state**

In 1853, several decades of pressure by Western countries for Japan to expand its commercial and diplomatic relations and to end what was called a “closed country” policy culminated in its forced opening by the US and the imposition of unequal treaties with the US and European countries. Recent European wars of imperialism elsewhere in Asia frightened the Japanese leadership into studying how to survive in the new international environment. This investigation, both by the government and by scores of private individuals, continued and accelerated after the 1868 overthrow of the shogun's regime and its replacement with a consciously modernizing government nominally under the emperor Meiji. While Japan was ultimately spared the colonial fate of most other Asian countries, it was not initially clear that Japan would be able to maintain its independence; moreover, the continuing existence, until 1911, of the unequal treaties signed in the 1850s grated on Japanese sensibilities and impeded economic growth.

Both government and private proponents of “civilization and enlightenment” (*bunmei kaika*), hoping to persuade the West of Japan's modernity and its right to equal treaties and relations with the West, rushed toward modernization, propelling Japan into a whirlwind of changes in the decades after 1868. Many changes were instigated by government policies, such as a unified capital at Tokyo; replacement of officially mandated stratification by status or class with policies encouraging social mobility; a revised legal code; a parliamentary

system of government; a modern military; a modern (though partially gender segregated) educational system; a modern economic infrastructure including telegraph, railroads, mining and manufacturing; improved agriculture; modern hygiene; urban development; construction of gender in law, institutions and discourse; construction of the “nation” and Japanese ethnicity and identity; and an expansive foreign policy.

Dress reform was part of this government-led modernization attempt. Dress reform included not only policies concerning proper styles for the modern person interacting with Westerners, but also policies about how much clothing to wear. Offended by nearly naked male rickshaw pullers and day labourers, many Westerners considered Japanese barbaric and improper. To persuade foreigners that they were not uncivilized, Japanese authorities in 1871 required men who worked in the street to wear something less revealing than loin cloths, admonishing them not to be “laughed at by foreigners”.<sup>8</sup> The authorities also promoted styles for men’s hair: samurai-style topknots were to be cut off in favour of contemporary Western coiffures after 1872. As early as 1871, a verse claimed: “If you tap a shaven and topknotted head you will hear the sound of retrogression . . . but if you tap a close cropped head of hair you will hear the sound of culture and enlightenment” (see figure 5.2).<sup>9</sup> Men conducting official business with Westerners or attending government functions were required to dress in the Western mode. Western dress was required not only to persuade the West of Japan’s move toward modernity, but also to signal a turning away from the old court styles that were considered *un*-Japanese because they were Sinicized and effeminate in the modernizers’ eyes.<sup>10</sup> While men outside of officialdom were not forced out of their kimonos (*clothing*) and into Western trousers and jackets, they were fined for not following codes of *dress* (in the broad sense of the word) in terms of nudity and hair fashions.

At the same time, private individuals undertook their own quests for modernity. With every aspect of life open for debate and reform in the new society, many saw that the way to strengthen Japan against the Western threat was to become “civilized and enlightened”. For some, that meant studying and implementing ideas of rights, citizenship, freedom and democracy. Many read the quickly translated works of Western theorists such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, François-Marie Arouet de Voltaire or John Stuart Mill. “Citizenship” – a term that implies the possession of rights, including the right to protection as a member of the national community and the right to vote and exercise the same political rights granted to other members of the national community – was demanded by men and some women in the People’s Rights Movement of the 1870s and 1880s.<sup>11</sup> Although no one had the rights of citizens at first, over time, men gained some rights. Feminists, struggling to gain those rights enjoyed by some men in the 1920s and 1930s – a time when the

need to emulate the West in order to protect Japan from Western dominance was no longer a concern – adopted several forms of men’s public sector self-representation, including Western styles. “Modern” dress was gendered as well as being connected to ethnicity, both of which were linked to membership in the emerging nation-state.

Private individuals of the 1870s who wore Western styles were part of the discursive environment of civilization and enlightenment. At first these were only males. Gentlemen were to learn not only how to behave politely and unlike the rough samurai, but also to learn how to dress in ways that would show Western observers that Japan was moving along a modernizing trajectory. For the most part, Western clothes (called *yōfuku*) were worn in public, where modern men did their work. Returning home, many slipped off the external symbols of civilization and modernity and slipped on the relaxing kimono.<sup>12</sup> Not all *bunmei kaika* advocates followed this pattern, however. Journalist Fukuchi Gen’ichirō, for example, whose undergarments were “so elegant that a Parisian servant mistook them for dining napkins”, was portrayed in an 1885 painting of a battle in the Satsuma Rebellion of 1877 “resplendent from head to toe in exquisitely tailored haberdashery, squeezing a walking stick under his arm, calmly taking notes while infantrymen fight it out in the background under clouds of billowing smoke”.<sup>13</sup> Fukuzawa Yukichi, author of several best-sellers about the West, also urged young men to wear civilized Western clothes – at least until the last years of his life when he made a sharp reversion to *wafuku* (Japanese clothes). Most other would-be wearers of *yōfuku* in the 1860s and early 1870s were less sartorially inclined, mixing an umbrella with wooden *geta* (sandals), a top hat with *hakama*, or an evening cape with an outdoorsman’s flannel shirt.<sup>14</sup> In time, public men, working in white-collar jobs in offices, school rooms, and government service, as well as working-class men in mines and factories, wore versions of *yōfuku* identified in the West and Japan with their class and occupation. By the end of the nineteenth century, Western clothing had been naturalized for men, and though still called “*yōfuku*” (literally “Western clothes”), the term itself was increasingly drained of its foreign meaning, coming to be translated simply as “clothing”.<sup>15</sup> The important markers in men’s *yōfuku* were those of class, occupation and wealth.

### Imperialism and national identity

At the same time, *yōfuku* had not entirely lost its connotation of modern and civilized. That is, men’s *yōfuku* also signified “Japanese” as opposed to “colonial”. Although Japanese men in the colonies did not confine their clothing choices to *yōfuku*, often wearing Japanese kimono at home or even in public, their tendency to wear Western styles, especially in the shape of the uniforms



**Figure 5.2** An 1870s print shows an “enlightened man” (*kaika no hito*) with the facial hair popular in the West at the time and wearing a complete outfit of Western clothing, replete with hat, cane, and dog; a “half-enlightened man” wearing Japanese clothing but also a cap and shoes and carrying an umbrella; and an “unenlightened man” in full samurai garb and hairstyle. Credit: Edwin O. Reischauer and Albert M. Craig, *Japan: Tradition and Transformation*, revised edition. Copyright © 1989 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Used with permission.

of professionalism (e.g. military uniforms, scholars’ and bureaucrats’ suits) was not only a reflection of the growing naturalness of Western styles but also a way of distinguishing the “natives” from modern Japanese. Japanese in the colonies viewed their dress as a type of “world fashion” – to expand the scope of a term used to describe the contemporary deracinated acceptance of Western styles such as jeans, sweat shirts, athletic shoes or business suits as universal.<sup>16</sup> While the counterpart of world fashion in contemporary usage is ethnic or national dress chosen by those who wish to distinguish themselves as members of a group, the counterpart in the era of colonialism was often a tradition invented or defined by the colonizer.

As historian Tessa Morris-Suzuki aptly notes, “Citizenship in the colonial world . . . was torn by contradictory impulses”.<sup>17</sup> In Japan’s case – as in England’s in Ireland – the proximity of the colonies and the similarities in cultures often made these contradictions fraught with tension. Primarily, this

tension derived from the colonists' impulse to assimilate the colonized while at the same time defining them as sufficiently different ("incomplete Japanese" in Morris-Suzuki's evocative phrase<sup>18</sup>) to require domination by a more modern and enlightened civilization. In time, their civilizing mission would be completed, and the colonized would be assimilated as Japanese. But what would be the starting point for the process? How would it be determined when the process had been completed? Taiwan offers a good example of the nexus of Japanese imperialism, gender, and dress.

Soon after Taiwan was made a Japanese colony in 1895, the imperial government sent ethnographers and other scholars into the island's towns and villages to describe the state of civilization and society. Race and ethnicity were hotly debated in Japan and the West at that time,<sup>19</sup> and it comes as no surprise that dress would be a category of analysis of the racial difference or lack thereof of the Taiwanese native inhabitants. Native Taiwanese had long been subjected to Qing attitudes about dress; Taiwanese men and women, who wore little clothing before Chinese concepts of modesty led to the increased covering of women, were viewed by Chinese as less than fully human because of their nudity.<sup>20</sup> When the Japanese arrived, men in professional *yōfuku* used cameras to gaze at and capture for propagation and analysis the images of the "backward" Taiwanese. Because the process implies that the Taiwanese were backward and the Japanese in their Western masculine clothing were "civilized", there was a possibility of advancing the Taiwanese over time, thereby justifying Japanese imperialism.<sup>21</sup> The Japanese desire to construct the tradition of Taiwanese dress through photography and scientific study had an additional motivation – that is, creating a distinction between the "authentic" Taiwanese tradition and the layer of Qing influences, which the Japanese saw as effeminate after their victory in the Sino-Japanese War (1894–95).<sup>22</sup> While the Japanese applauded the covering of Taiwanese women's breasts under the influence of Chinese dress styles, they had little respect for any Chinese influences on masculine attire. It was the duty of the imperial government, they believed, first to document and then to eliminate the old forms of clothing – for Taiwanese men, that is, as previously "backward" men were the ones who would, in theory, be eligible for eventual citizenship when they attained civilization. Here we see the merging of dress, invented tradition, imperial power, the modern scientific state and gender.

### **Gendering location – women in public**

Japanese women in the late nineteenth century, like colonial subjects, were in a contradictory position vis-à-vis modernity and dress. Japan itself, under the pressure of unequal treaties, continued to be viewed as "feminine" in contrast



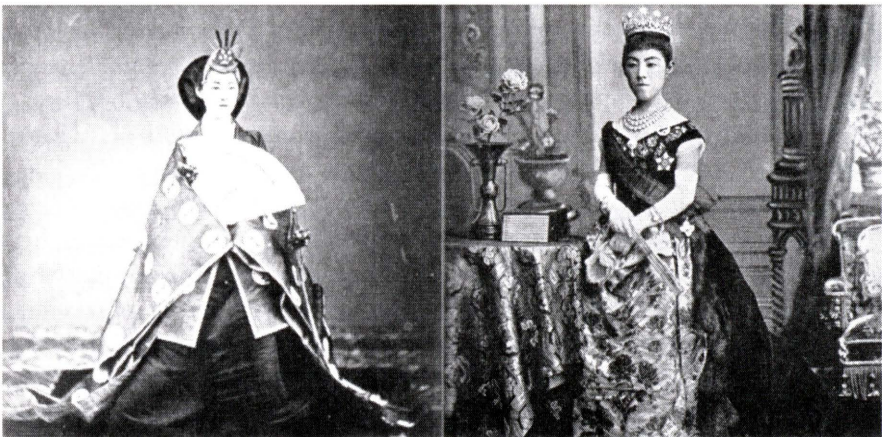
to the “masculine” West – a trope applied, in turn, by the Japanese to the Chinese by the end of the nineteenth century. Even popular culture replayed the gendered identities of Japan and the West in such forms as *Madame Butterfly*, Giacomo Puccini’s 1904 opera about the betrayal of a gentle Japanese woman by an American cad. On the one hand, Japanese leaders and advocates of “civilization and enlightenment” wished to escape from their unwanted feminization; on the other, many sought to preserve women as the symbolic “repositories of the past” in an era of dizzying change, in historian Sharon Sievers’s classic phrase.<sup>23</sup> If modern subjectivity or even citizenship were the end result of civilization and enlightenment, then what place did women have? Feminists, both male and female, sought an expanded public role for modern Japanese women, but others believed women’s role should be in the intertwined public and private (domestic) realms that the Japanese government had crafted with its valorization of motherhood (domestic) in service of the state (public).<sup>24</sup> What was a woman to wear in the interstices of public and private if, for men, *yōfuku* represented the public and *wafuku* the private?

The notion of location is perhaps as important in analyzing clothing in the Meiji era as a modern notion of sexualized gender. To gain rights, Japanese feminists argued, women would have to gain subjectivity through education and involvement in civil society (at that time, this implied the public sector as opposed to the domestic).<sup>25</sup> Women had always ventured outside the home to shop, to attend cultural events, or to travel, if they were urban residents, or to work in the fields, if they were farmers. But women had not interacted publicly in political or diplomatic endeavours. Nor had pre-industrial Japan employed large numbers of factory workers or workers in modern fields, such as the telephone operators, bus ticket takers, secretaries, department store clerks, and especially teachers and nurses who entered the workforce after the beginning of the twentieth century. Married and unmarried women in these fields were dressed by their employers in public-sector Western dress.

Even before middle- and working-class women entered employment outside the home and adopted *yōfuku* uniforms just like their male counterparts in business suits or workmen’s overalls, another class of Japanese women was made to dress in the Western mode. To stem the embarrassment of seeming barbarian, Japanese leaders urged women to get rid of Japanese bodily markers of gender, such as blackened teeth and shaved eyebrows, which struck Western observers as almost as strange as semi-nude male rickshaw pullers. The empress appeared publicly with natural eyebrows and unblackened teeth to set the new style in motion in 1873.<sup>26</sup> Although some women wished to wear short hair, as men had been required to adopt the short coiffures of Western men, they were forbidden to cut their hair. A few had done so, to the consternation of a magazine reporter in 1872: “Recently in the city we have seen women with

close-cropped hair. Such is not the Japanese custom and furthermore nothing of the sort is seen among the women of the West. The sight of this ugly fashion is unbearable”.<sup>27</sup> The following year, women were prohibited from cutting their hair short. Western models were the justification for some changes and for the retention of other practices in bodily adornment. Although some historians have argued that the prohibition on women’s bobbed hair stemmed from male leaders’ anxiety about women demanding civil rights along with men, the hair regulations were more likely the result of the same motivation as clothing the wives of government leaders in *yōfuku* during public events after 1886 – to mimic the West in order to avoid foreign ridicule.

Women were not yet asked to exchange their kimono for dresses in the 1870s, as were men who interacted with Westerners in the government and diplomatic corps, but some women did try out Western styles. It was not until 1886, when the empress, who had worn Japanese dress alongside her Western-clad husband at public events since 1872, decided that a consort to a modern emperor needed to dress in the modern – i.e. Western – mode, that Japanese women were also required to wear *yōfuku* at public diplomatic events such as state dinners and fancy-dress balls (see figure 5.3).<sup>28</sup> Announcing the policy, the empress reached back to Japan’s antiquity to state that the new style was actually in conformity with court dress of more than an millennium earlier.<sup>29</sup> It is no coincidence that the dressing (elimination of shaving and blackening) and clothing (wearing of Western clothes) of the public female body were



**Figure 5.3** The Empress (1872, left) continued to wear Japanese clothing in public and private long after her husband abandoned it. As wives of statesmen were called on to play public roles at diplomatic events, they were required to wear Western dress to symbolize their – and Japan’s – modernity in 1886. The Empress set the tone. Photographs in the public domain.

altered to downplay Japan's inferiority (read weakness or femininity) at a time when its leaders were attempting to revise the unequal treaties.<sup>30</sup> Japan was not alone in making sartorial demands on its public individuals to persuade Western governments of its civilized nature; in 1701, Peter the Great of Russia had demanded that all public business and government be conducted by individuals in Western dress, and that aristocratic women be brought out into the public to interact in a "modern" way with aristocratic men.<sup>31</sup>

And yet, other public female bodies remained clad in *wafuku*. From about the 1890s to the 1920s, average women going about their business in public reverted to *wafuku*. More prominent women, such as Kishida Toshiko, Fukuda Hideko, Kanno Suga and other very outspoken feminists of the Meiji era also wore Japanese clothes.<sup>32</sup> Their demands were for rights in the family, society and politics within Japan – they were not working to convince a foreign audience of their modernity. Public sector involvement for women did not always mean that they had to wear *yōfuku* to be effective, men's practices notwithstanding. To be sure, feminists were not yet demanding the full rights of citizenship, including suffrage, and when they did make these demands in the 1920s, quite a few began to wear *yōfuku* alongside women working in the modern economic sector and young women of sophistication and fashion. But in the late nineteenth century, *wafuku* was not identified as contradictory to feminism. Even the European and American Dress Reform Movement of the mid-nineteenth century, a feminist effort to free women of unhealthily confining corsets, promoted the Japanese kimono as a liberating garment.<sup>33</sup>

Women working in Japan's modern economic sectors wore Western-style clothing, but unlike the case of the empress, feminist women or, later, fashionable New Women and Modern Girls, little was said about them. Working women's clothes were not necessarily of their own choosing, and they were donned for pragmatic reasons. Unlike the clothing worn by the elite, no one would call pragmatic clothing "fashion". No one wore it to make a statement – of the fashion variety or of the political variety. Histories of fashion in the West apparently have also given little attention to what dress historian Diana Crane calls simply "alternative clothing".<sup>34</sup> Alternative clothing was not fashion; it was considered practical and workaday. It included school uniforms, factory uniforms and professional work clothes for teachers, nurses and other working women. In the nineteenth-century West, at its most extreme, it encompassed "bloomers" and other trousers, but more often it included practical straight (not bustled) skirts, tailored men's style suit jackets, neckties of various sorts, and shirtwaist shirts and dresses. Collars were high and fabrics were simple. Alternative clothes in Meiji Japan set the stage for the popularization of Western clothes after World War I, and made it possible for feminists to make a political statement with their choice of attire. Women had

become accustomed, as children and as workers, to wearing *yōfuku* at least part of the time. And it was linked with public work, a prerequisite for civic engagement and, in time, civil rights. If *yōfuku* was appropriate to women's participation in the public sector, it helped open the door to the struggles for citizenship after World War I.

The first girls' school uniforms made use of Japanese elements, unlike boys' uniforms, which were modelled on men's army uniforms from 1879.<sup>35</sup> Girls at first wore *bakama* over their kimono, making for a serious, studious and professional appearance. By the 1920s, girls' school uniforms took on the (skirted) sailor suit form they continue to have today. Both army and navy uniforms were, as we shall see below, Western clothes, and the children's versions were as well. The girls' sailor suit, with its skirt, was a form of alternative clothing like the straight skirts with tailored jackets and neckties worn by late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Western women students and professionals. Textile workers, recruited from the countryside and possessing very few articles of their own clothing, were given a rough kimono for the trip to the factory and, although many workers continued to wear protective aprons over their kimonos and used cords to tie up their sleeves, factory managers increasingly distributed *yōfuku* uniforms to prevent accidents caused by kimono sleeves being caught in the machinery. Red Cross nurses, whose numbers increased rapidly after the Russo-Japanese War in 1904–05,<sup>36</sup> were clad in the style of their counterparts in the West. Stage actors and actresses, always in the process of performing gender through their roles, were masters at using clothing as part of their work.<sup>37</sup> Japanese women in the colonies were praised in local publications during the 1910s for working on behalf of the nation as agents of Japanese modernity; Japanese "women in *bakama*" carried out modern professions as "liberated women" in Korea.<sup>38</sup> Many working women were still dressed in kimono as late as the 1920s, but the trend towards practical alternative *yōfuku* clothing began before the turn of the century.

### "A nation dressed in arms"

The institution ultimately responsible for the expanding thrust of the modernizing state was, of course, the military. Gendered male, its uniforms were a unique type of *yōfuku*. As historian Theodore Cook notes, "Japan's new army considered itself to be the embodiment of the new age. . . . This spirit of transcending tradition through organization and technology required a transformation of the Japanese people, especially its men".<sup>39</sup> The first man to be so transformed was the emperor. A photograph of the emperor in 1872 shows him in courtly attire that could have been pulled from a trunk stored away a millennium earlier, while a photograph from 1873, the first year of Japan's new

national conscript army, depicts him in a Western-style field marshal's uniform. As Cook notes, "Young Japan was now to be portrayed not as a perfumed Mikado, but as a belligerent man arrayed in the symbols used to endow Western monarchs with emblematic competency and dynastic virility".<sup>40</sup> Even a lowly conscript came to be seen by the early 1900s as an honourable "imperial male" who wore "the same insignia on his uniform as the Great Field Marshal Emperor and bearing the colors of Regiment X".<sup>41</sup> "As in Sparta and at Cambridge University . . . military-style training arms the nation and leads them to become a nation dressed in arms," according to a leading army officer in 1898.<sup>42</sup> The uniform created a central place in the modernizing state for Japanese manhood and symbolized the projection of Japanese (masculine) power in Asia (see figure 5.4, COLOUR PLATE SECTION). And yet, the uniform did not confer full citizenship in the sense of being the foundation of the state; that was a role reserved for the emperor under the Meiji Constitution. Rather, the uniform rendered Japanese males imperial subjects, a status that could not be similarly fulfilled by women, who had to seek other ways to serve the state.

### Citizen or imperial subject?

Women had no dress that similarly symbolized the projection of power. Even while in the colonies, women who wore *yōfuku* were either fashionable in a modern sense, engaged in wearing "world fashion", or carving out a space for the development of their subjectivity within the overseas Japanese community that was often less confining than Japanese society at home. The colonies offered women elbow room and granted a kind of mobility sought by feminists at home; in this they resembled their sisters in the metropole.

Citizenship in the sense of full sovereignty of the people was not necessarily sought by many of the most ardent advocates of civil and women's rights. After World War I, the feminist suffrage movement increased the pace of its demands for gender equality, but few challenged the continuing existence of the sovereign monarch, choosing instead to work around him. Socialist feminists opposed the imperial system, but because advocating its abolition was illegal, their discussion was *sotto voce*, if at all. Feminists' discussion of citizenship, then, must be considered in the context of its circumscription by the imperial taboo. That being the case, it was none the less active, and dress played an important role in the movement.

As we have seen above, how one dressed was in part determined by one's location. Professional clothes or work clothes, which were often but not exclusively some form of *yōfuku*, were worn in the workplace, and *wafuku* was more likely to be worn as a comfortable garment inside the home. Because the home was a locus of women's role as imperial subjects, it was not, however, a "private



sphere” in the Western sense; the public and domestic spheres were mutually interpenetrated, and men and women occupied both. What frightened conservatives in the 1910s and 1920s was not women’s passive existence in the public sphere. It was, rather, women’s forceful declaration that the public world was their place, too, and that they would define their role in that space as well as the clothing they would wear while occupying it. These women were not viewed as angling to be tolerated as virtuous daughters in the textile mills, wearing the uniforms they were handed and sending pay packets home to hungry relatives in the countryside – a trope that itself is somewhat fanciful.<sup>43</sup> Nor were they the (stereotyped) image of noble nurses or dedicated “good wife, wise mother” types, active in the public sector, it was believed, only on behalf of the nation or their families. Rather, the bright young women of the 1910s and 1920s who challenged the notion of virtuous women in the public sector (many of whom were, indeed, mill hands, nurses, teachers, and even mothers) were part of a cultural shift represented by a number of symbols, one of which was their modern, hip clothing. It was in that climate that feminists demanding the rights of citizenship emerged.

As we have seen, “alternative dress” eased women’s entrée into workplaces in the modern public sector, although Japanese women had long been active in farms and towns outside their homes, regardless of their garments. Alternative dress was functional and practical – and therefore non-threatening. On the other hand, stylish fashion worn by the New Women of the 1910s and the Modern Girls of the 1920s could be provocative, in both senses of the term – both challenging old norms and being sexually charged – linking power and female gender representation in ways that factory uniforms did not (see figure 5.5, COLOUR PLATE SECTION).<sup>44</sup> At the same time, the wearing of these uniforms and new hairstyles constituted what historian Vera Mackie calls the “practices of modernity”, which reified, through dress, both gender and class distinctions.<sup>45</sup> And it was through these practices that new feminine subjectivities were formed and were played out in the public sphere.

Economic growth during World War I and the global spread of international culture after that war opened many opportunities for young women’s employment. Although the feminist literary women of the previous decade, often called “New Women” (*atarashii onna*), prepared the ground in which their postwar younger sisters could plant their roots, that older generation was often seen as sexually degenerate, bourgeois and self-centred.<sup>46</sup> The far more numerous Modern Girls of the 1920s were working women of modest means who enjoyed some independence, worked as typists, teachers, nurses, telephone operators, office workers and sales clerks, and wore the stylish clothing of women of greater wealth. Many had girls’ higher school educations.<sup>47</sup> Their independence and disposable income led some to suggest they were promis-

cuous. Yamamoto Gunpei, a colonel in the Salvation Army, assumed it would be “a matter of course” that Modern Girls would make sexual mistakes. A newspaper article asserted that women with disposable incomes were “probably having sex orgies off somewhere in the corner of the office”.<sup>48</sup> Modern Girls were described as wearing short skirts, bobbed hair and modish Western clothing. Their most prominent feature was their legs, visible because of their short skirts, capable of striding and dancing.<sup>49</sup> Modern Girls, in short, made exhilarating copy in newspaper and magazine articles as well as in novels, scandalized some of the public by claiming some degree of independence as agents of their own lives, and represented most clearly the modern era in which men and women occupied the same space.<sup>50</sup>

Occupying the same space but not sharing the same rights encouraged feminists to crank up their demands for equality during the reign of the Modern Girl. Even if most Modern Girls were more focused on consumption (itself a form of claiming public space, but beyond the scope of this study) than on politics or militancy, some did work to enhance women’s rights in the public arena. Suffragist feminists such as Ichikawa Fusae and Hiratsuka Raichō, two of the leaders of the New Woman Association, a short-lived (1919–22) but influential feminist organization, took advantage of the new climate and the new acceptability of Western fashions to link *yōfuku* and the quest for citizenship. Other climate factors may literally have been immediately responsible for their sartorial decisions, but in the end, Ichikawa never resumed wearing *wafuku*, even under better weather conditions. The weather was particularly warm and humid during the summer of 1920, so hot that Ichikawa Fusae and Hiratsuka Raichō decided to exchange their Japanese kimono for Western garb. *Yōfuku* was a bit expensive for political activists who pinched their pennies in order to print handbills or mail out their publications, but Hiratsuka’s elder sister had recently learned to sew Western patterns and was willing to try out her new skills. Ichikawa recalled in her autobiography that stares of surprise accompanied them as they walked through Tokyo’s streets in their navy blue suits and hats. “I remember our picture appeared in some newspapers,” Ichikawa wrote in her autobiography.<sup>51</sup>

These stares were welcome, however, as the activists sought publicity for their organization. At the time, the New Woman Association was seeking to amend a pernicious law that prohibited women’s participation in public political rallies and meetings and membership in political parties, as well as to pass legislation protecting women from men with syphilis. Neither of these laws could get by conservative opposition in the House of Peers (the aristocratic chamber in Japan’s bicameral parliament) until a third colleague of Ichikawa and Hiratsuka, Oku Mumeo, lobbied Fujimura Yoshirō, the most intransigent opponent of women’s rights, while wearing a kimono and carrying her baby on



Figure 5.6 Ichikawa Fusae (standing, in Western suit) leads a meeting of the New Woman Association in 1919. Seated (third from left) in Western dress, is Hiratsuka Raichō. Credit: Mainichi Newspapers. Used with permission.

her back. If a woman could be a dutiful mother while advocating for rights, he figured that perhaps women could have rights. Oku's clothing and demeanour affected the influential opponent's view, and he persuaded others of like mind to vote to allow women to attend political meetings in March 1922.<sup>52</sup>

Numerous photos of feminists at work throughout the 1920s show them wearing a mix of Western and Japanese-style clothing. Street scenes indicate that women in general were as comfortable with Western and Japanese clothes, and both styles came to be seen as normative by the end of the decade. This changed rapidly with the onset of World War II. In 1939, women were encouraged to wear *monpe* (baggy work trousers) even in the city, a considerable sacrifice for Japan's fashionable women. Moralistic busy-bodies taunted women who still wore elegant kimono or *yōfuku*, but the wearing of *monpe* was not required.<sup>53</sup> Within a few years, however, the severe shortage of supplies, rationing of clothing, and economic deprivation made wearing *monpe* essentially universal in both urban and rural Japan. At the same time, feminists' demands for equal rights had been silenced by the rising tide of essentialist

nationalism and authoritarianism. The quest for citizenship was a moot issue in a wartime state in which the cult of the emperor was promoted. And yet, feminist groups struck a Faustian bargain with the government, earning wartime respectability as distributors of food, organizers of war bond sales, and recruiters of women to factory work. Striding through the streets in their *monpe*, women headed up neighbourhood committees in the absence of men. But after the war, *monpe* were linked in the public mind to the deprivations and losses of the war, rather than to the small bits of empowerment women gained by cooperating with the government. As women finally gained the vote in 1946, they threw off their *monpe*.

Rebuilding the destroyed infrastructure, housing stock, factories and farms was a difficult task in the decades after the war, but the question of citizenship and women's relationship to the state was not raised until the second wave of feminism in the 1970s. But when it was, women once again linked their representation through dress to the furthering of feminist causes. At the same time, military uniforms continued to play a role in defining Japanese-ness, even when the military was supposed to be downplayed under Article IX of the postwar Constitution. Since the war it has been children who have worn the uniforms that define Japanese identity, the prewar army uniforms for boys and the prewar sailor suits for girls.

## Summary

It is a truism that "clothes make the man (or woman)". Class, status, gender and sexuality are categories for which individuals seeking to project an identity often choose their style of adornment or body covering. But the construction of the individual through dress has meaning that extends beyond personal identity, important though that is in societies made up of individuals whose aggregated choices reflect common discourses about appropriate modes of representation. Dress, that is, can be made to reflect public policy; it can be a tool of imperialism; it can be a marker of citizenship, nationality and ethnicity; and it can define or reify notions of gender and modernity. In the case of modernizing Japan, dress accomplished all of these between the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. By adopting Western clothes, Japanese manhood was empowered to build an empire and to project outward both its military and "civilizing" missions; by devising practical (often though not always Western-inspired) clothing to wear in public, Japanese femininity could claim a space in the public sector into which feminists could insert themselves. In both cases, a gendered construction of citizenship was an essential part of a Japanese modernity defined by the state and signified by individuals' clothing choices.

## Notes

- 1 "Clothing" implies the removable cloth or other coverings worn by individuals; "dress" may also include body adornment, including hairstyles, body painting and tattooing, and modification of body parts to form a particular body shape, as well as states of dress and undress.
- 2 Kate Soper, "Dress Needs: Reflections on the Clothed Body, Selfhood and Consumption", in *Body Dressing*, ed. Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wilson (Oxford: Berg, 2001), p. 16.
- 3 Barbara Burman and Carole Turbin, "Introduction: Material Strategies Engendered", in *Material Strategies: Dress and Gender in Historical Perspective*, ed. Barbara Burman and Carole Turbin (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), p. 5. Similar approaches are taken by William J.F. Kennan in his chapters "Introduction: *Sartor Resartus* Restored: Dress Studies in Carlylean Perspective", and "Dress Freedom: The Personal and the Political", in *Dressed to Impress: Looking the Part*, ed. William J.F. Kennan (Oxford: Berg, 2001).
- 4 For more on the fine gradations of status indicated by clothing, see Hitomi Tonomura, "Coercive Sex in the Medieval Japanese Court: Lady Nijō's Memoir", *Monumenta Nipponica* 61, no. 3 (2006): 283–338.
- 5 For more on the limited gender division of clothing accompanied by the gendering of hair styles, see Takeda Sachiko, "Menswear, Womenswear: Distinctive Features of the Japanese Sartorial System", in *Gender and Japanese History*, vol. 1, ed. Wakita Haruko, Anne Bouchy and Ueno Chizuko (Osaka: Osaka University Press, 1999), pp. 187–211.
- 6 Cross-dressing to perform a gender role distinct from one's "biological sex" is a frequent theme in Heian literature. See, for example, Gregory Pflugfelder, "Strange Fates: Sex, Gender, and Sexuality in *Torikaebaya Monogatari*", *Monumenta Nipponica* 47, no. 3 (1992): 347–68.
- 7 Takeda Sachiko, "Trousers, Status and Gender in Ancient Dress Codes", in *Women and Class in Japanese History*, ed. Hitomi Tonomura, Anne Walthall and Wakita Haruko (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1999), pp. 55–60.
- 8 Donald H. Shively, "The Japanization of the Middle Meiji", in *Tradition and Modernization in Japanese Culture*, ed. Donald H. Shively (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 81.
- 9 Cited in Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni, "Kimono and the Construction of Gendered and Cultural Identities", *Ethnology* 38, no. 4 (1999): 355.
- 10 Keiichirō Nakagawa and Henry Rosovsky, "The Case of the Dying Kimono: The Influence of Changing Fashions on the Development of the Japanese Woolen Industry", *Business History Review* 37 (1963): 62.
- 11 Barbara Molony, "The Quest for Women's Rights in Turn-of-the-Century Japan", in *Gendering Modern Japanese History*, ed. Barbara Molony and Kathleen Uno (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 468–9.
- 12 Japanese men were not alone in using the loose-fitting kimono as a comfortable robe for inside wear. Early modern Dutch traders wore "Japonsche Rocken" as dressing gowns. Aarti Kawira, "The Kimono Body", *Fashion Theory* 6, no. 3 (2002): 300.
- 13 Donald Roden, "Thoughts on the Early Meiji Gentleman", in *Gendering Modern Japanese History*, ed. Molony and Uno, p. 85.
- 14 Liza Crihfield Dalby, *Kimono: Fashioning Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 65.
- 15 The term "fuku" without "yō" or "wa", which simply means "clothing", refers only to Western-style clothing. Masami Suga, "Exotic West to Exotic Japan: Revival of Japanese



- Tradition in Modern Japan”, in *Dress and Ethnicity*, ed. Joanne B. Eichler (Oxford: Berg, 1995), p. 97.
- 16 Joanne B. Eichler and Barbara Sumberg, “World Fashion, Ethnic, and National Dress”, in *Dress and Ethnicity*, ed. Eichler, p. 300.
  - 17 Tessa Morris-Suzuki, “Becoming Japanese: Imperial Expansion and Identity Crises in the Early Twentieth Century”, in *Japan’s Competing Modernities: Issues in Culture and Democracy, 1900–1930*, ed. Sharon Minichiello (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), p. 161.
  - 18 Morris-Suzuki, “Becoming Japanese”, p. 175.
  - 19 An excellent analysis of the notions of race, backwardness and civilization in turn-of-the-century Japan may be found in Julia Adeney Thomas, *Reconfiguring Modernity: Concepts of Nature in Japanese Political Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
  - 20 Henrietta Harrison, “Clothing and Power on the Periphery of Empire: The Costumes of the Indigenous Peoples of Taiwan”, *positions* 11, no. 2 (2003): 338.
  - 21 Harrison, “Clothing and Power”, p. 345.
  - 22 Postwar attitudes towards the Qing were not limited to notions of their “femininity”. For other attitudes, see Sandra Wilson, “The Past in the Present: War in Narratives of Modernity in the 1920s and 1930s”, in *Being Modern in Japan: Culture and Society from the 1910s to the 1930s*, ed. Elise K. Tipton and John Clark (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000), p. 175.
  - 23 Sharon L. Sievers, *Flowers in Salt: The Beginnings of Feminist Consciousness in Meiji Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983), p. 15.
  - 24 For a detailed analysis of this point see Kathleen Uno, “Womanhood, War, and Empire: Transmutations of ‘Good Wife, Wise Mother’ before 1931”, in *Gendering Modern Japanese History*, ed. Molony and Uno, pp. 493–519.
  - 25 For a more complete discussion of subjectivity, rights and citizenship, see my “Quest for Women’s Rights in Turn-of-the-Century-Japan”, in *Gendering Modern Japanese History*, ed. Molony and Uno, pp. 463–92.
  - 26 Dalby, *Kimono*, pp. 76–7.
  - 27 Magazine article cited in Goldstein-Gidoni, “Kimono and the Construction of Gendered and Cultured Identities”, p. 355.
  - 28 Sally A. Hastings, “The Empress’ New Clothes and Japanese Women, 1868–1912”, *The Historian* 55, no. 4 (1993): 675.
  - 29 Hastings, “The Empress’ New Clothes”, p. 680.
  - 30 Hastings, “The Empress’ New Clothes”, p. 679.
  - 31 Christine Ruane, “Subjects into Citizens: The Politics of Clothing in Imperial Russia”, in *Fashioning the Body Politic*, ed. Wendy Parkins (Oxford: Berg, 2002), pp. 50–51.
  - 32 For more on feminist leaders in the Meiji period, see Sievers, *Flowers in Salt*.
  - 33 Kawira, “The Kimono Body”, p. 300.
  - 34 Diana Crane, *Fashion and its Social Agendas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 101.
  - 35 Sharon Kinsella, “What’s behind the Fetishism of Japanese School Uniforms?”, *Fashion Theory* 6, no. 2 (2002): 215–37.
  - 36 Sharon H. Nolte and Sally Ann Hastings, “The Meiji State’s Policy Toward Women”, in *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600–1945*, ed. Gail L. Bernstein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 162.
  - 37 See Ayako Kano, *Acting like a Woman in Modern Japan* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 90–91 for actress Sadayakko’s ability to perform as a Western or a Japanese woman.

- 38 Barbara J. Brooks, "Reading the Japanese Colonial Archive: Gender and Bourgeois Civility in Korea and Manchuria before 1932", in *Gendering Modern Japanese History*, ed. Molony and Uno, p. 314.
- 39 Theodore F. Cook, Jr., "Making Soldiers: The Imperial Army and the Japanese Man in Meiji Society and State", in *Gendering Modern Japanese History*, ed. Molony and Uno, p. 261.
- 40 Cook, "Making Soldiers", p. 261.
- 41 Cook, "Making Soldiers", p. 280; Fukuzawa Yukichi, cited in Cook, "Making Soldiers", p. 282.
- 42 Army First Lieutenant Numano Yoshio, cited in Cook, "Making Soldiers", p. 280.
- 43 Barbara Molony, "Activism among Women in the Taisho Cotton Textile Industry", in *Recreating Japanese Women*, ed. Bernstein, pp. 217–38.
- 44 This paralleled the reaction to bloomers and other forms of masculine-based attire worn by American women in the mid-nineteenth century. Women had long worked on farms, shopped in stores, and taught in schools, so their presence in the public arena was unremarkable. But wearing an item of clothing identified with men while moving freely in public was too much of a challenge. See Kate Luck, "Trousers: Feminism in Nineteenth-century America", in *The Gendered Object*, ed. Pat Kirkham (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 141–52.
- 45 Vera Mackie, "Modern Selves and Modern Spaces: An Overview", in *Being Modern in Japan*, ed. Tipton and Clark, p. 189.
- 46 An excellent new study of the New Woman is Dina Lowy, *The Japanese New Woman* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007).
- 47 Barbara Sato, *The New Japanese Woman: Modernity, Media, and Women in Interwar Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 128.
- 48 Both citations from Sato, *The New Japanese Woman*, p. 124.
- 49 Miriam Silverberg, "The Modern Girl as Militant", in *Recreating Japanese Women*, ed. Bernstein, p. 242.
- 50 For more on the links between the print media and Modern Girls, see Sarah Frederick, *Turning Pages: Reading and Writing Women's Magazines in Interwar Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), especially ch. 2 and ch. 4.
- 51 Ichikawa Fusae, *Jiden: Senzenben* (Autobiography: Prewar volume), (Tokyo: Shinjuku Shobo, 1974), p. 77.
- 52 Oku Mumeo, *Akekure* (Dawn and dusk), (Tokyo: Dabuiddosha, 1957), pp. 27–8.
- 53 Thomas R.H. Havens, *Valley of Darkness: The Japanese People and World War II* (New York: Norton, 1978), pp. 18–20.