

Film, Fashion & Consumption
Volume 8 Number 1

© 2019 Intellect Ltd Article. English language. doi: 10.1386/ffc.8.1.89_1

DRAKE STUTESMAN
New York University

Sleeves and *Kosodes*: Gate of Hell/costume/fashion/history

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on how the study of costume contributes to the interdisciplinary nature of fashion studies and film studies. How vital the study of costume is as intersection of history, fashion, politics, art and culture, can be answered through exploring the costumes in Kinugasa Teinosuke's 1953 Japanese period film, Jigokumon (Gate of Hell) (1953). The reality that fashion, economies, technologies, inventions, identities and politics are inextricably entwined and that film costume must reflect that consolidation is complexly evident in the film.

KEYWORDS

costume
Japan
Heian
Kinugasa Teinosuke
film
fashion
kimono
jūni hitoe

A vital question was posed at the 2015 *Film and Fashion Symposium: Exploring the Intersection between Fashion and Film Studies* – how does the study of costume contribute to the interdisciplinary nature of fashion studies and film studies? How vital the study of costume is, as an intersection of history, fashion, politics, art and culture, can be answered by exploring the costumes in Kinugasa Teinosuke's 1953 Japanese period film, *Jigokumon (Gate of Hell)*. The reality that fashion, economies, technologies, inventions, identities and politics are inextricably entwined, and that film costume must reflect that consolidation is complexly evident in *Gate of Hell*. In unexpected understated ways the film reveals how widespread the meaning of fashion is and how far and how

deep into national consciousness fashion reaches. The film conveys the power of fashion with polemical directness and uses costume design's adaptation of historical dress to convey a political message. Set in twelfth century Japan, at the fall of the Heian period, an era spanning almost 400 years from 794 to 1185 and known as the Golden Age, this lavish film uses its costumes to convey something the script, in a censored post Second World War Japan, would not or could not reveal.

Gate of Hell's costume designer Wada Sanzo created designs that precisely reflected the original Heian fashions, but he used two inaccuracies, both associated with the kimono, Japan's iconic garment and so strong a living part of its material culture that, as kimono historian Liza Dalby notes, 'clothing and wearer merge' (1993: 4). The kimono was not known in Heian times, not appearing as what became recognized as the true kimono form for another three centuries but, through the inclusion of a look-alike kimono sleeve and a garment known as the *kosode*, a petite robe and kimono precursor from a later century, Wada built a subtle, secondary costume story. These two anomalous details in his period look communicated something crucial and contemporary to a splintered and demoralized 1950s Japanese audience living under American Occupation. It communicated a sense of Japanese solidarity.

That the use of two such small details as a single sleeve and a single robe could have the potential to affect an audience under such pressures, in what seems to be a relatively generic period film as *Gate of Hell*, has to be seen in context of the centrality of the kimono in Japanese culture and the importance of the concept of cohesion as representing Japanese identity. *Gate of Hell* is a piece of a larger picture of post-war Japan, on many levels. The rise of Japanese Imperialism in the thirties, the brutal effects of the Depression and Japan's aggressive 1931 invasion of Manchuria fomented and kept intact a jingoistic nationalism that was built around and promoted as the pursuit of a Japanese identity or, more literally, a Japanese-ness (Davies 1996: 2). This preoccupation continued into the 1940s but in the 1950s, when *Gate of Hell* was made, in the post-war ruins, it had a special urgency and the film, overtly and covertly, was part of that ethos. The pursuit of Japanese identity has a long history and the Heian era was one of its most exemplary gestational moments. The film's tragic story and its Heian setting were very familiar to Japanese audiences and brought a context to the *Gate of Hell* costumes that enabled them to convey, in the midst of the country's losses, not just Japan's past but its present and future in a way that was understood by a Japanese viewer.

Wada's references to the kimono are significant. It is not only iconic, it is a garment of great complexity, with no real equivalent in western dress. The kimono has a simple, elemental form that is solely, and unchangingly, a T-shape. It is also constructed from very few pieces. The body is a rectangle, formed from four rectangular panels. The front edge where the robe opens is faced with a one long folded length of cloth that also acts as a soft upright collar. The sleeves are made to form a T-bar and are square or rectangular, can appear as short, wide or long and can form hanging panels. An ingenious garment, the kimono never deviates from its T-shape but transforms its fundamental parts into an infinitely varying robe, often of exceptional beauty, that is able to convey exhaustive social information (Dalby 1993: 163–68). Any details, even the most rudimentary, that are added to its immutable T, such as the hem (revealing the formality of occasion), collar placement (revealing taste) and brightness of colour (revealing age) situate the wearer's identity in seasons, events, regions, traditions and the like. Even more is revealed in a full

kimono ensemble because the relationships of the parts are as significant as the parts themselves (Dalby 1993: 165, 173). But the sleeve is considered the kimono's most essential feature (Dalby 1993: 62). Each iteration of the sleeve is telling. Its shape, colour, pattern, stitching, texture, length, width, revealed or unrevealed lining, placement of lining, amount of material that the lining reveals, the sleeve hole's closure or lack of closure, manner in which its openings are sewn closed or left open, the size of the wrist opening, the contour of the rounded or squared sleeve corner, the sleeve depth, the way it hangs and the opening beneath the armpit are all crucially important.

Few single garments represent a nation as the kimono does. In the making of Japanese-ness, the kimono stands as a holistic principle, integrating a prime unchanging structure (its T-shape) with changing details (tailoring, colour, texture, pattern). Colour also expresses this principle, something that *Gate of Hell* utilized to the full. It was the first Japanese film to use the new Eastmancolor single strip process that produced a brightness that required far less lighting on set and which eliminated the need for the expensive Technicolor equipment, something difficult for post-war Japan, under intense sanctions, to import (Miyao 2013: 277). Part of the film's fame has been in its astonishingly lush, multi-hued colour; much admired, it has been critically considered 'rare' (Crowthers 1954), 'superb' and 'unsurpassed' (Anon. 1954). That colour is perceived as a felt experience, and a stimulating one, is universal to all cultures and cinema tapped that response, even in its earliest gestations. In his analysis of colour in early cinema, Tom Gunning recognized colour's gut impact as 'a mode of intensification, a heightened sense not only of seeing but of being alive' (2015: 15). Japanese colour coding shows an acute awareness of this reaction. Whereas the western colour wheel has three primary colours (red, yellow, blue) and three secondary ones (orange, violet, green), the Japanese spectrum is built on hues, with as many as 500 values. 'Green', as an example, is sorted into nuances of green with names such as Parrot, Mist, Jade, Limelight, Sea Moss, Eggshell, Spruce and Jewel (Yumioka 2005: 6–9). Moreover, colours positioned together take on a significance that covers countless categories, including difficult to quantify feelings that fit a social milieu such as 'reverence'. This deeply conceived system has roots in the Heian era, when colour was used to high effect during one of the most intensely colour-coded periods in Japan's history.

Fashion, in the Heian court, was the greatest proponent of the era's colour code. The fashion was unprecedented, almost wildly experimental, and it was part of the Heian court's effort to permeate Japan with Japanese-ness and to make, by the early ninth century, a new autonomous Japanese identity. It was a time when Japan, having repudiated centuries of Chinese influence, including severing diplomatic ties with China, strategically refashioned itself politically and artistically. The Heian court pursued a homogeneity of Japanese expression on virtually all levels and this ambitious period has been celebrated by one historian as 'one of the most unusual and engaging', because 'if any society in the world can be described as unique, it was that of Heian-Kyō' (Morris [1964] 1994: xxvi). The Heian era was foundational. It inaugurated a vibrant, germinal cultural sophistication and created a courtly style so integrated into the arts that courtliness became not about having privilege, but about having artistic skill. It was in the Heian era that the novel form appeared, the earliest version of the Noh theatre began and landscaping was developed as an art. Poetry and painting flourished among many other talents, as did a new aristocratic dress built to show off movement, silhouette and colour. The Heian period set such a

1. Hills describes the 1993 royal marriage ceremonies in which the couple are dressed in Heian garments during many symbolic and archaic services. In the twenty-first century the *jūni hitoe* and *sokutai* remain formal Imperial dress in coronations, marriages, and other ceremonies.

powerful cultural bar by establishing much of what is still considered classical Japanese that Heian arts, including its fashion, were embraced by later rulers and have continued to have a special place in the national consciousness (Hills 2007: 15)¹. The Heian court intricately interlinked its culture, imaginatively interweaving elements as disparate as architecture, dress, conduct and politics and viewing them as proactively energizing one another.

Fashion was a strategic facet of this cohesion. Heian dress for aristocratic women and men was dramatic and had emerged, in part, as a rejection of the constrained Chinese influenced style of the prior Nara period, during which the court look was a narrow dress and tight top bun. Heian fashion could not have been more different. The ladies wore their straight, black hair completely loose and it was a sign of great refinement to grow it so long that it trailed on the floor. Their signature ensemble was a set of silk robes with wide bell sleeves, known as *jūni hitoe* (twelve layers). Often padded and somewhat stiff, each a rich, usually contrasting, colour, the robes (as many as twenty) were worn on top of one another, in a specific order, forming an exaggerated, bulky but streamlined A-line form designed to spread out from the body and create a triangular opening where the robes parted in the front, revealing a wide pant-like undergarment (Kennedy 1990: 34).

The colours were always seasonal but not necessarily the season's natural colours: green and orange, for example, signified winter. The stunning striping



Figure 1: The Heian *jūni hitoe* worn in 1926 by then Crown Princess Nagako for her official ceremony to become Empress. Courtesy of Public Domain.

that appeared at the neckline, wrists, and the robes' front parting was considered the outfit's most important beauty, built around the way the layers played off each other. This colour play was an elaborate system known as *Kasane no Irome* and acted as a form of messaging. Since aristocratic women were forbidden to speak directly to or even look at men, they used *Kasane no Irome* in their *jūni hitoe* to circumvent court protocol. The *jūni hitoe* communicated a woman's personality, flair, tastes and desires. Each visible edge of colour was symbolic and each set of sequences spelled out the style that she liked, which courtly favour she had achieved, what seasons attracted her and more: these choices, in turn, revealed her love of the arts. The sleeve's striation was the most critical. Ladies displayed their sleeves' edges beneath their fans, or beside screens that hid their faces, and *Kasane no Irome* acted as virtual love letters and amorous advances to those the women wanted. Sleeves were so important in this period that they were eroticized and often written about as erogenous objects. The Heian courtier wore a simpler attire, the *sokutai*, a slightly drooping, solidly coloured, thinly padded, eight-layered (each one individually belted) outfit, with enormously voluptuous bell sleeves, forming a wide, but close fitting, wavy, box-like silhouette. The *sokutai* emphasized texture and utilized ties, openings, panels, seams, folds and a collar which, in all, revealed his service (civil or military) and the *sokutai's* colour revealed his rank. Only the Emperor was allowed to wear dark yellow. His top officials wore purple or black: then the ranks descended through maroon, crimson, dark green, light green, dark blue and light blue, until those with no rank wore brown or light yellow.

These garments were not viewed as a fashion that only differed from Chinese fashion. The repudiation of Chinese tastes and the desire to mark those of the Japanese was conceived by the Heian culture as interrelated and the *jūni hitoe*, in particular, embodied if not enacted Japanese-ness. It was a part of the dynamic inter-play of culture. Dress was even used as another way to bring to life the new Heian architectural concepts, *shinden-zukuri* (Stinchecum 1984: 23). Unlike those of the Chinese, interior Heian rooms were plain, almost stripped of furniture, with bare or matted (*tatami*) wooden floors. The walls became mobile, as many were made to be moveable screens (*shoji*) that slid back and forth. This changed the ambiance by bringing light into the rooms horizontally instead of vertically from above, reconfiguring the experience of the room as both a concrete and spatial unit. The open rooms and *tatami* floors suited the Japanese preference for sitting on the floor in both formal and leisure occasions, something the Chinese did not do (Bryant 2001).² The *jūni hitoe* was worn to keep its layers carefully intact so that the colours could be read and the outfit would make an arresting silhouette while walking and standing. While sitting, however, the *jūni hitoe* became a part of a larger whole. To show off Japanese style, the women spread out the sides of their imposing robes into piles, accentuating the Japanese love of the floor. The dress and the floor were both important signatures of the new Heian Japan and were deliberately created as something distinct from foreign influence. The display was an act of distinctiveness and the Heian sense of interrelationship – of the person, the dress, the architectural construction of space, and the Japanese lifestyle that each of them embodied – was, literally, performed as Japanese-ness by the woman in her *jūni hitoe* on the floor.

This was so beloved a spectacle that it became a favourite subject for painting and one often abstracted into lively, almost cubist forms. Far from being unwieldy, the *jūni hitoe* was perceived and lived in not solely as clothes

2. Kyoto was built using new Japanese architectural designs and new geomantic layouts, very different from those of the Chinese. Cohesion was the overall Heian concept, encompassing object, philosophy, art and perception into one field of action. The Chinese nobility built their estates as separate buildings, but Heian aristocrats reconceived them by adding connective walkways making the compound into a unit. The walkways were not simply practical or even aesthetic but became, in part, a way to reflect on philosophical perceptions of space and time while walking. This became a way to physically participate in the act of thinking about these concepts. By incorporating the time it took to walk them and the way their uniform height allowed space to be perceived uniformly, the act of walking, duration of movement, discernment through seeing and the connection that the walkway signified became both an enactment of contemplative ideas as well as reflection of them.



Figure 2: The jūni hitoe depicted in a pose popular in the Heian era, with the robes drawn in an abstracted form to suggest that the dress is a vibrant part of the Japanese custom of sitting on the floor. Kodai no Kimi, Potrait, A fragment of 36 poets scroll, colour on paper, mounted to hanging scroll, about 30 cm height, Kamakura Period, Japan, Courtesy of Tokyo National Museum.

but as a political act of identity and a critical and animated participant in the court's conversation. *Gate of Hell* was configured in many ways around this sense of Japanese cohesion. Even foreign critics picked up on *Gate of Hell's* form as an integration of traditional Japanese qualities. The *New York Times* film reviewer, Bosley Crowthers, one of America's most influential critics in the 1950s, admired the film's 'rare excitement' brought out by the

subtlety with which it blends a subterranean flood of hot emotions with the most magnificent flow of surface serenity. The tensions and agonies of violent passions are made to seethe behind a splendid silken screen of stern formality, dignity, self-discipline and sublime aesthetic harmonies. The very essence of ancient Japanese culture is rendered a tangible stimulant in this film.

(Crowthers 1954)

Gate of Hell's intense and obsessive drama is set at the end of Heian Golden Age, during the civil war's Heiji Rebellion in 1159, one of the war's crucial turning points, in which the Fujiwara Clan, who had ushered in and reigned over the great Heian era, is fighting a coup by two rival Clans to depose the sitting Emperor. *Gate of Hell's* story of tragedy and self-sacrifice starts with a crisis in which a royal lady must safely get through a war zone and the noble woman Kesa, played by esteemed actress Machiko Kyô, volunteers to act as

her double and ride in the Imperial carriage as it journeys through dangerous territory.³ When the entourage is attacked, a samurai, Moritō (played by Kazuo Hasegawa), saves Kesa and later demands that they marry. She is already married to a court noble, Isao (played by Wataru Watanabe), and happily, and rejects him. Moritō cannot cope with this refusal and viciously pursues her. Kesa never tells her husband that Moritō is stalking her and, in constant fear, she must endure the threats alone. Finally, this results in her death, as she intentionally submits to her own murder and substitutes herself for her husband in order to save Isao's life. When the men see what has happened, Moritō realizes that he has been driven only by ego and grieves. He begs Isao to kill him, but Isao refuses. Moritō has to face his own fate and becomes an itinerant Buddhist monk in an effort to find redemption.

Though period films had always been popular (director Akira Kurosawa alone had made eleven by 1950), the choice of medieval topics had a political side.⁴ These stories circumvented the penalties enforced by the US military, who controlled Japan from 1945–52, on any Japanese who overtly condemned the Occupation. It also emphasized traditional Japan (in a sense, literally a pre-war, thus pre-defeated, Japan) that would speak to the Japanese and suggest a return to the identity that lay in this past. Traditions were very much part of the *Gate of Hell's* foundation. The triangular story of Kesa and the two men who want her was famous in Japan, having been told since the thirteenth century in legends about the Heian civil war known as *The Tale of the Heike*. Numerous plays were written about the triangle, done in both Kabuki and European dramas, each with twists to the relationships, arrangements and murder, including an attraction between Moritō and Kesa (Anderson 2011: 150).⁵ This story threaded a number of offshoots, over decades, each with some kind of importance, often radical, and many known well in Japan. In the most legendary of these many tales, Moritō, once he had completed his penance, became a warrior monk, Mongaku Shōnin. This tangled up Moritō's character with Mongaku, the fabled warrior monk from *The Tale of the Heike* who had magical powers. Mongaku Shōnin became a famed central character in Kabuki, in a genre known as 'living history plays', one of which focused especially on Kesa and Moritō (Anderson 2011: 150). The Kesa and Moritō Kabuki play had been written as a reformist Kabuki drama, and it was then taken up in 1918 by celebrated unorthodox author Akutagawa Ryunosuke (Anderson 2011: 150). He wrote the tale as a piercing short story, 'Kesa to Moritō' ('Kesa and Moritō'), as a pair of intense, psychological, interior monologues, one by Moritō and one by Kesa. But it was Kan Kikuchi's far less extreme 1935 play, *Kesa's Husband*, a play well liked in Japan and which Kinugasa directed onstage, that Kinugasa adapted as the basis for his film. *Gate of Hell's* main characters came to the screen steeped in centuries of history, genre and interpretation. Furthermore, this was a story so popular, it served both traditional and experimental forms.

In 1953 (the year of *Gate of Hell's* release), nine years after defeat and after atom bombs destroyed two cities, Japan struggled with financial chaos, crushing black market crime, humiliation and death. The year *Gate of Hell* was made, 1952, was the last year that US law mandated Japan officially. Japanese film committees and censor boards also enforced strictures, trying to maintain a Japanese propriety that did not capitulate to 'British-American weakness' (Kurosawa [1975] 1983: 148–50). Severely restricted by censure and lack of utilities like electricity, a starving population also experienced havoc on their traditions through such stresses as the American promotion of western lifestyles, including in dress and sport, and the declaration in 1947, of the

3. Machiko Kyō played the lead in Kurosawa's twelfth century *Rashomon* and in Mizoguchi's late sixteenth century ghost story, *Ugetsu (Tales of Ugetsu)* (Mizoguchi 1953).
4. This was not unique to the Occupation as Kurosawa was drawn to period films, making many before *Rashomon* and many after, as did Mizoguchi. However, these particular films of the fifties were the ones that attracted international acclaim.
5. The Kesa-Moritō-Isao triangulation was an old story with many versions, mixing various legends. It was performed in kabuki and reformist kabuki, and as a semi-theatrical play. In the nineteenth century, the Imperial Japanese Dramatic Co. took it to the United States. It had been adapted by English and French playwrights, and acted, in one adaptation, by the superstar of her time, Mrs Patrick Campbell. It was from these versions that Akutagawa made his own version of the murder finale (Anderson 2011: 148).

6. Kabuki originated in the beginning of the seventeenth century as an all female theatre genre and became all male in the late 1630s.
7. Nikkatsu studios evolved out of an earlier conglomerate trust, known as the Greater Japan Film Machinery Manufacturing Company, Ltd., which was composed of various film enterprises, including two film companies, an importer of films distributed by Lumière's Cinematographie, and the head of the Fukuhodo chain, part of the various groups which had evolved from the start of Japan's film business in 1897.

Emperor Hirohito as a 'symbol emperor' and all power taken from him, stripping Japan of an acting Imperial figure, a figure deeply woven into the national social and religious systems. This crisis meant that the Japanese had to go forward but also had to, as director Kurosawa, Kinugasa's younger contemporary, said, 'come back to life', themes that appeared in the preoccupations of many. Kurosawa saw the post-war conflict as the urgency to clear the mind of the past, but at the same time use the past as a means to find purpose and strength in the present. He described the Japanese as having the 'need to work in the postwar as if we have no regrets [...] We need to bring back idealism and, without penetration into history, we can't go ahead' (Anderer 2016).

Gate of Hell suited these ideas, in part because of the avant-garde thinking that director Kinugasa brought to cinema and in part because of the multiple elements that rooted the film in Japan's history. Costume designer Sanzo Wada, born in 1883, brought an eminent lineage in Japanese arts to the film. He was a designer of kimonos and a colour expert who had established a reputation by the 1930s, during which he published six volumes on colour, a work still in print and in translation. *Gate of Hell* tapped into the Heian experience of raising Japan as a whole from foreign suppression into autonomous greatness. Wada's historical costume entered a modern Japan that was literally and culturally in ruins. His costumes' small deviations from the Heian history tapped into the national cohesion Japan had cultivated for centuries. His first inaccuracy was in the cut of the sleeve in the costume for the main character, Moritō, a sleeve that Wada would tailor to signify the enduring kimono, something the audience would recognize. The second inaccuracy was in the nascent kimono prototype, the *kosode*, which appeared first in the Heian era but only as a small silk undergarment, worn by women and men. *Gate of Hell* did not show the Heian *kosode* prototype but showed instead the *kosode*, held by Kesa, in its later incarnation when it became a short light robe that emerged in the fourteenth century. That the kimono, Japan's national dress, was in its first stage as the hidden *kosode* undergarment during the Heian period, is important, since it was in the Heian era that Japan enhanced a national identity that was made visible by interweaving colour, silhouette, and fashion with political and artistic autonomy. The kimono came to be a garment saturated with meaning, revealing social information through size, shape, texture, pattern, figuration and colour, a system reminiscent of the communicative Heian dress.

Kinugasa also was a man steeped in Japanese tradition who had worked for decades in the cinema, starting in the silent era. He came to cinema from the Kabuki theatre, having been an actor for many years, working as an *onnagatta*, the highly regarded, difficult specialty role of a male actor playing a woman, which still continues today. Though certain men became *onnagatta* stars, this particular skill was a Kabuki bedrock as all actors since the genre's seventeenth-century inception were required to accomplish the techniques of playing female roles (Leupp 1990: 90).⁶ Kinugasa straddled the worlds of Japanese drama. He was schooled in its ancient theatrical modes of skilled stylization and was in the forefront of Japan's push into cinema, acting as an *onnagatta* in the 1910s' films at Tokyo's Nikkatsu studio, Japan's oldest (continuous) studio, consolidated in 1912 from various cinema ventures (Anderson and Richie 1982: 30).⁷ He fought the advent of females entering women's roles in the 1922 strike against the studio, but the increasing popularity of actresses led to the breaking of *onnagatta* domination in cinema and he had to look for other work in the industry. By the late 1920s, he had directed at least 50 films,

including two expressionistic ones, *Kuratta ippeiji* (*A Crazy Page/A Page of Madness*) (Kinugasa 1926), featuring insanity as a subject and using extreme avant-garde techniques, and *Fujiro* (*Crossways*) (Kinugasa 1928). The latter was the first Japanese film to have commercial release in Europe and Kinugasa travelled there, screening it in 1929, meeting other filmmakers. Kinugasa was in the forefront of this outreach from Japan. He was lauded for making internationally appreciated films by the head of Shochiku, *Crossways'* studio, because there was a push, by some, that Japan produce a Japanese-ness that could be revered abroad. One critic wrote, at the time, in his review extolling *Crossways*, that he felt that the unusual and well-received film was leading the way for the Japanese to 'dig deeply into their emotions' and make 'something unique' (Genrichi cited in Miyao 2013: 126–27). Twenty-two years later, now working at the successful Daiei studio, Kinugasa made *Gate of Hell*.

Filmmakers Kurosawa and Kinugasa, though twenty years apart in age, both experienced the struggles that the Japanese felt concerning the phenomenon of cinema, viewed as a European/American invention and not friendly to the Japanese world-view. Though an active cinema industry had thrived in Japan since the late 1910s, the industry was met with ambivalence. In his 1933 treatise *In Praise of Shadows* (1977), which condemned the west's intrusion into Japan, novelist Jun'ichirō Tanizaki famously wrote of the incompatibility between the Japanese sense of time and space and that of the west. He wrote of the cohesion that had been the mark of Japanese living. He recalled, in palpable detail, how people lived, not with electric light but with light from fires, ovens and sunlight. He recalled these experiences as not only tactile and spatial but as an experience of time. The oven's hue as it changed, the dimming of sunlight through a thick roof, the shadow from candle light – he saw these ambient and felt moments as the same, acclaiming the shadow as much as the object that cast it. This was a Japanese perspective, well illustrated in its screens and scrolls, which placed all its actions on one plane. This meant that the eye could absorb objects and spaces as if they were simultaneous and they could be perceived in a leisurely, repetitive way. *In Praise of Shadows* argued that the Japanese sense of narrative could not fit with western versions and targeted the film industry as antithetical to Japanese concepts of space, pacing, duration and placement. Japan was drawn to a holistic perspective and the west attracted to vanishing points. But that Japanese filmmaking had been less open to the kind of nuance that Tanizaki argued was evident in aspects such as, as Daisuke Miyao's study revealed, its very lack of an 'aesthetics of shadow', a use of shadow which, until the 1920s, had been 'inconceivable' (2013: 126–27).⁸ With this background, Tanizaki's focus on the shadow as quintessentially Japanese had relevance with directors like Kurosawa, Yasujiro Ozu and Kenji Mizoguchi, who wanted to change the industry and move towards a new aesthetic (Davies 1996: 45–46) and Kinugasa was seen as a leader in their innovations (Miyao 2013: 2, 122).⁹

Gate of Hell was an international success. The film is still considered a classic internationally by cineastes and is routinely included in lists of best pictures in the history of cinema. Highly praised, on its release in 1954 when it was distributed in the United States and Europe, it won Kinugasa the American Academy Award for Best Foreign Film, the French top award (which later became the Palme D'or) at the Cannes Film Festival and the New York Critics Award for Best Foreign Film. The film's sublime use of colour was conveyed substantially by its costumes and the film also won, for Wada, the Academy Award for Best Costume in a Color Film.¹⁰

8. The studios had been concerned with making the screen image as clear as possible to the viewer. 'Clarity first, story second' was the studio motto and the story was subordinated to a plain way of telling it by lighting the sets extremely brightly.
9. Davies terms the work of these directors and a few others a 'monumental style', in which they created films which, as a medium, suited the Japanese pursuit of identity with such specificity that their art created a Japanese sensibility that worked with foreign narrative concepts.
10. At the time, the award for best costume was given in two categories: colour and black and white.

Gate of Hell was one of the most notable of the Japanese films released after Second World War, in the first wave of this country's movies to gain international attention. Others were Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950), which won the 1951 Venice Film Festival Grand Prix, and Mizoguchi's acclaimed *Saikaku ichidai onna* (*Life of Oharu*) (1952), *Ugetsu* (1953) and *Sanshō dayū* (*Sansho The Bailiff*) (1954). All these films were set in medieval Japan (*Rashomon* also took place in the Heian period) and were tales told in cinematic ways that appealed to western audiences. Though Japan, from the start of its film industry, had a chauvinistic approach to film distribution, dividing films into those considered of a higher quality as made for a Japanese audience and those less so for foreigners, there are many reasons why these 1950s films had a wide attraction. The draw of *Rashomon*, which became so famous that it was credited with the start of international interest in Japanese films, may be in part because its cold black and white, mesmerizing close-ups, austere unknown rituals, wild forests, violent rape and murder and its posing, through the device of subjective and conflicting narrations, of a mysterious unanswerable reality, echoed the 1950s war fatigue and experience felt by millions. A similar identification with an insoluble catastrophe may have happened to the Japanese audience in watching *Gate of Hell*. The four centuries of the unique Heian-Kyō had built a powerful, political national identity, one imbued with a deep Japanese sense of self, created out of its own culture, marking a new individuality of Japanese-ness that reflected across society. *Gate of Hell* was set as this Golden Age entered its destruction.

Unlike Akutagawa Ryunosuke's short story, Kinugasa's *Gate of Hell* was not psychological. Its storyline was simplified into a formula of passion, violence, destruction, sacrifice and the search for redemption, set in the midst of the high visual art of both the Heian style and Kinugasa's filmic talents. Though he did not aim for the psychological, Kinugasa did aim for visual and timing contrasts that reflected the psychological. This sensibility for using visual techniques to convey emotion was evident in his previous works *Jūjūro* (*Crossways*) (1928) and *Kurutta ippēji* (*A Crazy Page*) (1926). In *Gate of Hell*, Kinugasa created a sense of an interior world of calm through his formal rendering of the peace that had thrived in Kesa's marriage. Using a slow pace to reveal their routines, lit in warm, lush, contrastive hues to show the Heian home's open rooms, Kinugasa brought out the formalized measured manner of medieval court behaviour and, as he slowed the pace of the film, slowed the movements of Kesa and Iaso, he produced an atmosphere, in its slowness, its silence, that was devoted and loving. Through stylized timing, which, to a Japanese audience, recognizably came from the contrapuntal structures of theatre as used in Kabuki, the couple's peace and interiority emerged. Kinugasa's balance of pacing, use of colour as a structure and his expertise as an *onnagatta* underlay his quiet rendering of the violence, love and despair that existed in Kesa's constant unspoken fear and which acted as the narrative's baseline. The film's layered history – of the august, deeply Japanese artistic lineage in the lives of the director, designer and actors, the Heian glory and downfall, the storyline's fame, the intermixing of Eastern perspective with western mechanics, and the Japanese attention to cohesion as identity in material arts such as the kimono and the colour system – is vital in understanding how Wada could have used a sleeve and the *kosode* to bring a different potency to the legendary story.

Within *Gate of Hell*'s prodigious crucible of Japanese tradition and modern cinematic forms and the new American colour process, Wada created *Gate of Hell*'s memorably accurate Heian costumes. He heightened the brilliant colour



Figure 3: Moritō wears large kimono shaped sleeves. Courtesy of the author.

11. The *kosode* also had roots in the Heian period as a rough hemp outer robe used by peasants.

but simplified the complex robes by making the men's *sokutai* less voluminous and the women's costumes lighter than the thick coats of the *jūni hitoe*. He approximated the *jūni hitoe* costumes' layers by sewing colour-coded strips of material into the edges of the sleeves, necklines and hems, to simulate multiple robes. In Moritō's costume, Wada flattened the huge bell Heian sleeves and reconstructed their ballooning shape into one that was flat and square with a long opening (unlike the closed Heian sleeve) and a sharp edge, making a mirror of a kimono sleeve.

Though, in general, Wada duplicated the Heian's true details, his reduction of the bulk of the twelfth century dress was possibly a way to cut budget costs and give the actors more mobility. But his two major changes – that of the sleeve and the *kosode* – created a substantial inner story to the film. By introducing the kimono cut, Wada not only emphasized the highly significant Japanese sleeve, especially that of the kimono, but he brought together both contemporary and old Japan, which the kimono represented so intimately. Its sleeve's square base form, layered with meaning, signalled an immutable social structure and, to 1950s Japan, this sleeve would resonate as key to Japan's coherent culture, coherent society.

The second costume inaccuracy was in the use of the *kosode*, a white silk robe-like, short-sleeved Heian undergarment considered a precursor to the kimono but its short sleeves and small sleeve openings precluded it from having a true kimono shape.¹¹ The Heian aristocrats, both women and men, wore the *kosode* under their robes only and it was not worn differently until the Muromachi period (fourteenth to seventeenth centuries), 200 years after the Heian era ended, when the delicate robe began to emerge as outerwear. It then became fashionable for a woman to hold the frail, at times diaphanous *kosode* over her head with both hands, as if warding off sun or rain. Kesa appears holding her *kosode* in this way, which is here historically inaccurate.

In this use of the costume, Wada incorporated two periods: the fashion of the early kimono (*kosode*) held overhead (fourteenth century) with the *jūni hitoe* robes (twelfth century). But in using the *kosode*, he also introduced the



Figure 4: Heian character Kesa in her twelfth century robes, holding the fourteenth century kosode over her head, in the style of the Muromachi period. Courtesy of the author.

kimono as a material object, as the prototype *kosode*, which, especially in its Muromachi form, was recognizable to a Japanese audience. That the *kosode* referenced the real kimono, a garment housing so much Japanese identity, pointed to the kimono's distant beginning and to its art and ingenuity that reflected everyday Japan and the symbolic nation. Wada's combined costume also allowed for a delicate beauty not found in the true twelfth century dress and this also brought these two periods together. The image of Kesa in Wada's costume, holding the *kosode* over her head, wearing vivid green and orange *jūni hitoe* robes, is beautiful and evocative and is one of *Gate of Hell's* most commonly reproduced images.

But as important as the sheer aesthetic is how the full ensemble costume (*kosode* and *jūni hitoe*) subtly conflates Japanese history, in the same way that the inaccurate sleeve does, giving a Japanese viewer a subliminal sense of national coherence. This coherence is rendered invisibly in the formation of the totality of all the film's costumes because Wada offered his audience a new configuration of material and immaterial culture. He addressed the country's sense of loss by using costume design as a construction in itself, able to reveal hidden structures in the film narrative, as well as to build a new narrative from the structures of fashion.

REFERENCES

- Anderer, Paul (2016), interviewed by Jerry Carlson, *City Cinematheque*, CUNY TV, 22 October.
- Anderson, Joseph L. (2011), *Enter a Samurai: Kawakami Otojiro and Japanese Theatre in the West*, vol. 1, Tucson: Wheatmark.
- Anderson, Joseph L. and Richie, Donald (1982), *The Japanese Film: Art and Industry*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Akutagawa, Ryunosuke ([1910] 2017), *Rashomon and Other Stories* (trans. Rene Malenfant), Middletown, DE: Cygnus-Digital.com.

- Anon. (1954), 'Gate of hell', *Look*, 23 March.
- Bryant, Anthony J. (2001), 'Shinden-sukuri estates of the Heian period', *Sengoku Daimyo*, <http://www.sengokudaimyo.com/shinden/Shinden.html>. Accessed 1 December 2017.
- Crowthers, Bosley (1954), 'Gate of hell', *New York Times*, 14 December.
- Dalby, Liza (1993), *Kimono: Fashioning Culture*, Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Davies, Darrell William (1996), *Picturing Japaneseness: Monumental Style, National Identity, Japanese Film*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Dower, John W. (1999), *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*, New York: W.W.Norton & Co. Inc.
- Fujiki, Hideaki (2013), *Making Personas: Transnational Film Stardom in Modern Japan*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Graves, Maitland (1941), *The Art of Color and Design*, New York: MacGraw-Hill Book Company.
- Gunning, Tom (2015), 'Applying color: Creating fantasy of cinema', in Tom Gunning, Joshua Yumibe, Giovanna Fossati and Jonathon Rosen (eds), *Fantasia of Color in Early Cinema*, Amsterdam: Eye Filmmuseum/Amsterdam University Press, pp. 15–27.
- Hills, Ben (2007), *Princess Masako: Prisoner of the Chrysanthemum Throne*, New York: Penguin.
- Keene, Donald (1999), *Seeds in the Heart: Japanese Literature from Earliest Times to the Late Sixteenth Century, A History of Japanese Literature*, vol. 1, New York: Columbia University Press.
- (ed. and trans.) (1955), *Anthology of Japanese Literature: From the Earliest Era to the Nineteenth Century*, New York: Grove Press.
- Jansen, Marius B. (2002), *The Making of Modern Japan*, Cambridge: Belknap Press.
- Junichiro, Tanizaki (1977), *In Praise of Shadows* (trans. Thomas J. Harper), Maine: Leete's Island Books.
- Kennedy, Alan (1990), *Japanese Costume: History and Tradition*, Paris: Konecky and Konecky.
- Kinugasa, Teinosuke (1953), *Jigokumon (Gate of Hell)*, Japan: Daiei Studio.
- Kurosawa, Akira ([1975] 1983), *Something Like an Autobiography*, New York: Vintage.
- Leupp, Gary P. (1997), *Male Colors: The Construction of Homosexuality in Tokugawa Japan*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Miyao, Daisuke (2013), *The Aesthetics of Shadow: Lighting and Japanese Cinema*, Durham: Duke University Press.
- Morris, Ivan ([1964] 1994), *The World of the Shining Prince: Court Life in Ancient Japan*, New York: Vintage.
- Nygren, Scott (2007), *Time Frames: Japanese Cinema and the Unfolding of History*, Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis.
- Riley II, Charles A. (1995), *Color Codes: Modern Theories of Color in Philosophy, Painting and Architecture, Literature, Music, and Psychology*, Hanover: University of New England.
- Standish, Isolde (2000), *Myth and Masculinity in the Japanese Cinema: Towards a Political Rereading of the 'Tragic Hero'*, Richmond: Curzon Press.
- Stinchecum, Amanda Mayer (1984), *Kosode: 16th to 19th Century Textiles from the Nomura Collection*, New York: The Japan Society.
- Vicari, Justin (2016), *Japanese Film and the Floating Mind*, Jefferson: McFarland & Co.

Wada, Sanzo ([1933] 2011), *Haishoku Soukan, a Dictionary of Color Combinations*, Tokyo: Seigensha.
Yumioka, Katsumi (2005), *Kimono and the Colors of Japan: Kimono Collection of Katsumi Yumioka*, Tokyo: Pie Editions.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Stutesman, D. (2019), 'Sleeves and *Kosodes: Gate of Hell*/costume/fashion/history', *Film, Fashion & Consumption*, 8:1, pp. 89–102, doi: 10.1386/ffc.8.1.89_1

CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Drake Stutesman is an adjunct professor at New York University, teaching theoretical film costume. She edits the peer-reviewed, cinema and media journal, *Framework*. Her work has been published by, among others, the British Film Institute, MoCA (L.A.) and *Bookforum*. Recent work includes *Hat: Origins, Language, Style* (Reaktion Books 2019) and essays on melodrama, the 1960s, costume scholarship and subjectivity in biography. She is writing a biography of costume designer, Clare West, and a monograph on milliner/couturier, Mr John.

Contact: MA Program in Costume Studies, Department of Art and Art Professions, New York University – Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human, Development, 34 Stuyvesant Street, New York, New York 10003 USA.

E-mail: ds3544@nyu.edu

Drake Stutesman has asserted her right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the author of this work in the format that was submitted to Intellect Ltd.
