

# Acculturation of French fashion in Japan after World War II: Fashion as a device constructing identity

Kyoko Koma

*Vytautas Magnus University / Mykolas Romeris University*

**Abstract.** In our paper, we discuss how French fashion was acculturated in Japan after WWII, a period in which Japan rushed to modernise/occidentalise. Through an analysis of the dominant discourse of Japanese fashion magazines, we focus on the following French fashion trend that spread throughout Japan: a long, flared skirt inspired by a Paris fashion. The skirt was a new look by French fashion designer Christian Dior just after WWII. The other focus of this paper is on the soaring popularity of European brand Louis Vuitton in 1970 and 1999. Modernisation in the fashion realm following WWII could be said to be the localisation of the French fashions followed by Americans; the manner by which French fashion was acculturated in Japan after WWII changed according to the Japanese social context. Articles in the dressmaking fashion magazine *Soen* promoted the new style blindly. In the 1970s when great economic growth was realised, Japanese travellers shopping for *real* Louis Vuitton bags in France were attempting to belong to middle class society. Featured articles on Louis Vuitton in 1999 presented several ways of *localising* the usage of this bag for all generations of women to find belonging in their own groups.

## Introduction

It could be said that Japanese culture is accustomed to absorbing elements of other cultures: With Buddhism, the Japanese *hiragana* syllabary modified the Kanji logograms that came from China. Japanese life was occidentalised after opening to foreign trade and diplomatic relations in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. This process continued with Americanisation after Japan's defeat in WWII. Westernised fashion in Japan is certainly no exception to this movement. Japanese people, especially men, started adopting occidental clothes in the Meiji era. Elite women and geishas also adopted such clothing.<sup>1</sup> In the Taisho era, French fashion, such as the *Garçonne* style, was diffused among certain Japanese women, who were called *moga* (modern girls). This

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<sup>1</sup> In *Madame Sadayakko*, it is written that according to the *Nichiyo shinbun* (『日曜新聞』) published in January 1872, a [geisha] has a Chinese style haircut and wears Western clothes while playing the Chinese musical instrument *koto*. She is invited to a party and lionised by her clients at their drinking party (「支那風ニ剃髮シテ洋服ヲ着用シテ月琴ヲ携ヘテ客ニ招カレ酒席ニモテハヤサルヨシナリ」) (Downer 2007, 35).

categorisation included women belonging to the elite class. Nonetheless, data from 1926 concerning men and women's clothes on Ginza Street of Tokyo (Ouchi 1996, 36) showed that 95 per cent of the women wore kimonos, in contrast with men, 69 per cent of whom wore Western clothes. According to Japanese fashion journalist Junko Ouchi, Americanised fashion trends influenced by French fashion started to become popular after Japan's defeat in WWII (ibid., 105–6).

Occidentalisation or Americanisation could be said to be a synonym for modernisation in Japan, which has absorbed foreign cultures into its own culture. In the Asian context, Japanese national identity is characterised by its ability to realise the most successful and quick occidentalisation=Americanisation=modernisation in Asia.<sup>2</sup>

Among westernised objects, clothing is, according to Japanese philosopher Kiyokazu Washida, things transforming the existence of *I* provoked by transforming *my* visibility (Washida 1993, 12). Thus, fashion could be a device to visibly embody Japanese national identity as westernisation. At the same time, it is a device transforming Japanese identity into modernised and westernised individuals. Thus, in this paper, we will examine how modernised identities were visualised in Japan through fashion trends.

### Research subjects

In our paper, we examine how French fashion was acculturated in Japan after WWII when Japan rushed to modernise/occidentalise Japanese culture. The paper focuses on the following French fashion trends in Japan:

1. Long flared skirts created by Christian Dior just after WWII: a Paris fashion and new look;
2. The boom of European brand name goods like the Louis Vuitton Monogram bag in the 1970s and at the end of the 1990s.

The Second World War interrupted the 'modernisation' of the 1920s and 1930s in Japan (Hashizume 2006, 8). Parisian fashion was introduced into post-war Japan, which again aimed itself towards modernisation. According to our hypothesis, these two fashion trends in Japan were significant as constructions of modernity in Japanese identity: diffusion of the 'New Look' style of French fashion designer Christian Dior, launched by his Haute Couture Collection (high class dressmaking) in Paris in 1947; Dior was the instigator of the world fashion trend of long flared skirts; another apparent tendency was the popularisation of the French Louis Vuitton luxury handbag, which has been in vogue since the 1970s in Japan.

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<sup>2</sup> 'Japan is the non-Western nation that has most sincerely and successfully absorbed Western civilization and culture', which has permitted Japan to distance itself from other Asian countries since the Meiji Era (Iwabuchi 2006).

### Method of analysis

We will examine how Japanese fashion magazines present French fashion in order to persuade readers (which in our paper are called *model readers*,<sup>3</sup> a term borrowed from Umberto Eco and Dominique Maingueneau) to incorporate it into Japanese fashion. As French semiologist Roland Barthes says, '[i]f the journal describes certain clothes through words, it is only to transmit information of which the content is: the fashion' (Barthes 1967, 18). With words, clothes become fashion; the media is considered one device for constructing and diffusing fashion. Thus, in our paper, we analyse discourse in Japanese fashion magazines that construct and communicate *the* Japanese fashion. As defined by Michel Foucault in *L'archéologie du savoir*, the sense of the utterance is diversified according to the situation. The utterance belongs to the discursive formation. In other words, the formation constructs the discourse, the conditioned ways of speaking in a given social group.

Based on this idea, French discourse analyst Maingueneau defines discourse as 'the "trace of an act of socio-historically determined communication" which legitimates the frame, including *the* knowledge, *the* literature, *the* philosophy'. According to Maingueneau, the discourse has to think about the 'dispositive of utterance which connects a textual organisation and determined social place' (Maingueneau, Chareaudeau 2002, 43). Discourse analysis aims to examine how discourse, limited by the institution of a society and of a given period, constitutes and communicates the event in a public space and how this event legitimates this institution.

In our paper, we try to make clear some unconscious aspects of the modern Japanese system though discourse analysis<sup>4</sup> from three periods: we try to examine the influence of media discourse on westernising Japanese fashion, the conditioning in each situation of uttering during our research period, how the media discourse constructs Japanese fashion and communicates it to readers, and how fashion trends legitimate Japanese society.

### Globalised French fashion in the world

French fashion is dominant not only in Japan but also throughout the world. As Yuniya Kawamura said, 'French fashion became dominant in Europe in the mid 17<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> 'When it concerns a printed text for a great number of readers, the receiver, before being *an empiric public*, that is the group of individuals who will read the text effectively, is only a kind of figure to whom the writer (one who writes) must loan certain aptitudes. The proportion of awaited linguistic competence and encyclopaedic competence will vary according to the texts' (Maingueneau 2000, 33).

<sup>4</sup> In this paper, our main focus is on discourses, but eventually we analyse the images accompanying the discourse. As Roland Barthes said, it is the discourse that 'anchors' the signification of images, which is ambiguous without explication (Barthes 1964). Dominique Maingueneau also said that the discourse would construct a kind of 'image' (Maingueneau 2000, 2). But we do not endeavour to discuss the superiority of the discourse over the image.

century during the reign of Louis XIV as political and economic power in Europe began to shift to France... Under Colbert's economic policy, the government took an active part in developing the luxury industries that were state-owned and operated' (Kawamura 2004, 33).

Under Napoleon III's policy, Paris haute couture was founded by English designer Charles Frederic Worth. The institutionalisation of fashion in France since 1868 has made Paris the fashion capital of the world. In 1868, La chambre syndicale de la couture et de la confection pour dames et fillettes (the Syndicated Chamber of Couture and Confection for Ladies and Girls) was established and founded the modern fashion system (ibid., 54–5). Thus, since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Parisian fashion trends have been the centre of the fashion world.

Throughout the world, Western clothing tendencies were popularised by the media and propagated through literary transport: Men who lived in various places in the world spread fashion trends during that time. Even women who lived far from Paris and could not buy Parisian fashions could make similar clothing at a low cost. In this way, one style was able to dominate world fashion. And Kawamura shows that 'the fashion institution in France possesses many methods for spreading fashion information worldwide. What started with dolls, plates and illustrations gave couturiers and designers the opportunity to expose their works to editors and journalists, who in turn, would choose the selected designers for distribution' (ibid., 71).

After 1970, when the prêt-à-porter (ready to wear) style started to dominate world fashion, other fashion designers such as accessible Zara and H&M began imitating styles at a lower price, diffusing the same styles. Though the prêt-à-porter collection is organised not only in Paris but also in Milan, New York and London, the Paris prêt-à-porter collections continue to exert the most influence in the fashion world.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> It is not only that Japan has introduced French fashion; Japanese fashion has been flowing to France since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first wave of Japanese fashion in Paris was the kimono at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. After the opening of Japan toward occidental countries at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the kimono influenced Parisians, that is, European fashion, with the Tea Salon at the Universal Exposition in Paris, the success of the novels of Pierre Loti (for example, *Madame Chrysanthème*), and Sadayakko dress, in memory of the actor Sadayakko Kawakami, who played in Paris at the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. The second wave of Japanese fashion in Paris was firstly at the beginning of 1970s when fashion designer Kenzo Takada went to Paris to launch his prêt-à-porter collection. In the 1970s, not only Kenzo Takada, but also Issey Miyake and another Japanese designers, started to go to Paris to present their collections, which Japanese in the fashion domain always aimed to emulate. In the 1970s in particular, Kenzo Takada had a major influence on the fashion society in Paris. This influence created a base for the success of Japanese fashion designers such as Comme des garçons and Yohji Yamamoto in the 1980s. In the 1990s, not only Japanese professional designers, but also Japanese street fashion, which arrived in France as 'Gothic Lolita' and 'Cosupuré' of Manga, started to influence French fashion.

### **Japanese fashion as localised-hybridised fashion**

Globalisation has been accused of ‘destroying indigenous cultures and imposing an American way of life on “local” populations’ (Storey 2006, 146–47). However, culture is a ‘compromise equilibrium’ between the two, a contradictory mix of forces from both ‘below’ and ‘above’, both ‘commercial’ and ‘authentic’, both ‘local’ and ‘global’, marked by both ‘resistance’ and ‘incorporation’, and involving both ‘structure’ and ‘agency’ (ibid., 151). As Stuart Hall observes, what we usually call the global, far from being something that, in a systematic fashion, rolls over everything creating similarity, in fact works through particularity, negotiates particular spaces and particular ethnicities, works though mobilising particular identities, and so on. Thus, there is always a dialogue between the local and the global (Hall 1991, 62).

In the following section, we examine how Japanese fashion magazines *localised* Paris fashion to encourage Japanese readers to make it their own.

### **New Look fashion trend created by Christian Dior**

The New Look style was created by haute couture designer Christian Dior in Paris and debuted at the Haute Couture Collection in 1947. During the war, women could not wear long feminine skirts because cloth was in short supply. After the New Look was presented in 1947 and lasting until the end of 1960s, the style presented in the Paris Haute Couture Collection dominated the world’s fashion trends. The style was often too expensive to buy, but to follow these trends, women made similar clothes by hand. Japanese women also followed this post-war trend.

### **Social context constructing and conditioning the discourse on the New Look in Japan**

We will now look at the Japanese social context when the New Look trend was diffused in Japan. First, there was an increase in the number of women, in particular war widows, studying western dressmaking. The westernisation of appearance was promoted by the record number of women going to dressmaking schools. Before WWII, the number of dressmaking schools was about 50, but after WWII, the number of dressmaking schools increased to about 400. The number of students was around 4,500 in 1947, but by 1951 that number had increased to 200,000. Whereas in 1949 there were approximately 2,000 schools, in 1951 this number increased to about 2,400 schools (Kimura 1993).

Second, the movement of re-modernisation/westernisation became urgent. Japanese anthropologist Aoki Tamotsu considers this period to be when the Japanese followed the occidental model and denied their own culture. As the author shows,

the Japanese ‘had to reconstruct their nation and their society after looking at the occidental countries as a well advanced example, after abruptly denying an idea’ (Aoki 1990, 27). Following French fashions became one of the visible ways Japan adopted ‘modernity’, which could signify westernisation for the Japanese in this period.<sup>6</sup> From 1948–1954, under the occupation of General Headquarters (GHQ), Japan had to modernise: Americanise, westernise and democratise its social system, which meant the denial of Japanese culture. As in the Meiji period, Japan had to keep up the appearance of being a democratised and modernised country for GHQ and the West. Following the same Parisian fashions followed by Americans played a role in this modernisation.

Within these social contexts, we now turn to how some significant articles from Japanese dressmaking magazines like *Soen* presented the New Look to Japanese readers.

### New Look presented in *Soen*<sup>7</sup>

*Soen* 装苑 is a dressmaking magazine that has been published since 1936 by Bunka Fukusō Gakuin. The Bunka Dressmaking School is famous in Japan, having produced famous designers such as Kenzo Takada and Yohji Yamamoto, both active in the French fashion world. Among articles about long, flared skirts and the New Look published between 1948 and 1950, we found three typical examples.

First, we located an article about dressmaking skills being influenced by the progress and greater numbers of dressmaking schools.

Whether we wear the ‘New Look’ or not, we don’t want to dismiss the study of art for the cut of any style. The more our skills improve, the more they will shine. We are trying to present a way of cutting similar to the ‘New Look’.<sup>8</sup> (*Soen*, September 1949)

The purpose of this article was to support and/or promote the progress of dressmakers, not to invite the reader to wear the New Look. The New Look, or a French fashion trend, is presented as an example of an improvement in skills for the Japanese dressmaker.

Another article discussed how to follow the New Look:

We see numerous Japanese women who follow the latest fashions while walking in the street. They don’t wear them well. In France, we don’t see the same case. When you wear a flared skirt, it is better to wear a tight top, as French women do. (*Soen*, July 1950)

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<sup>6</sup> According to Jun Eto, GHQ censored publications and if improper expressions concerning GHQ’s policies were found, it was not possible to release this publication. This system could favour the insertion of discourse permitting Americanisation-modernisation in this period (Eto 1995, 95–7).

<sup>7</sup> The New Look of Dior or New Look Style (long flared skirt) was published in seven *Soen* articles between 1948–1950.

<sup>8</sup> The title: ‘The Cut of the New Look Suit’. Similar contents can be found in the issues of *Soen* published in May and July of 1949.

To adapt to the abrupt modernisation following WWII, *Soen* tried to help the reader dress more like a French person and deny Japanese taste. This article is conditioned by the social context of which we have already spoken: By denying Japanese culture and standard values, *Soen* encourages readers to follow French fashion styles that were popular in America.

Nonetheless, we did find an article remonstrating the blind following of Western fashion trends:

Hanamori: I heard that a Japanese designer is shouting that the long skirt fashion is really an advance in women's culture... But there is a problem creating such a fashion. Could it not be said that it is touching that Japanese are grateful for this fashion?

Nakahara: I admit that the beauty of Western clothes is considered as a fashion trend in Japan.... In this sense, we can feel a kind of beauty in long skirts.... I hope that in present-day Japan people who work as leaders must connect Japanese fashion with Japanese life. The person who puts on a long skirt must adopt the fashion more intellectually, thinking about Japan's situation. (*Soen*, January 1949)<sup>9</sup>

These two people who gave their own opinions on the New Look style boom were treated as famous fashion specialists in Japan. Thus, the editor of this article asked them to discuss the New Look and present their thoughts in this article. This is the image of the speaker, to use the term of Aristotle. Hanamori's statement that the Japanese were grateful for this fashion reflects his negative and ironic opinion regarding the Japanese social situation in which Japanese people blindly followed Western culture. In contrast, another then-famous Japanese fashion specialist, Nakahara, suggested that Japanese should intellectually acculturate Western fashion tendencies to Japanese styles and stated that Western clothes were beautiful fashion trends in any way. These two opinions embody a kind of embarrassment regarding how new Western fashion trends affected Japanese culture.

Thus, in order to promote the following of the French New Look in post-war Japan, we can find articles that serve the following functions.

1. Educating readers as dressmakers.
2. French women posing as models for how Japanese readers should wear Western clothes.
3. Embodying a kind of embarrassment regarding how new Western fashion trends affect Japanese culture.

On the one hand, the articles promoted the idea that dressmakers and wearers should blindly follow the New Look. Some articles suggested following the trend as a 'compromise equilibrium' between global culture and local taste.

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<sup>9</sup> The title: 'Junichi Nakahara, Yasuji Hanamori: Long Skirt/Mini-skirt'. Similar content could be found in *Soen* published in 1948 (two articles) and in January 1949.

The New Look was followed and imitated not only by the Japanese but also by the French and women in other countries. If we then focus on French fashion magazines, *Vogue Paris* published in 1920 (for the elite class) presented original Christian Dior haute couture dress publicity, though the French magazine *ELLE* published in 1945 (for the middle class) presents ways of imitating the New Look.<sup>10</sup> Thus *Soen's* presentation of the New Look is similar to the context in which *ELLE* was published. It could be said that the fashion for the elite class was already democratised and globalised beyond class and national frontiers in earnest after WWII.

### Democratisation of Louis Vuitton in Japan

In the late 1960s, the mini-skirt presented in French haute couture fashion (designed by Courrèges)<sup>11</sup> became globally popular. For their part, Japanese women tended to follow fashion trends by imitating and making such mini-skirts themselves. They modelled these fashions after the New Look presented in French and Japanese fashion magazines. Since they could not buy authentic Western clothing at this time, they created their own. Around the 1970s, when the Japanese started to go to abroad under the social context of economic growth, they could buy true Western fashion goods.

Since the 1970s, prêt-à-porter (ready-made clothes) has dominated world fashion instead of haute couture. Fashion has taken many forms. Nonetheless, many Japanese men and women of all ages tend to buy high-class bags as souvenirs when they go abroad. The most popular is the Louis Vuitton Monogram<sup>12</sup>.

According to *La malle aux souvenirs*, this trademark was established in 1854 and produced the *layette*, a haute couture dress for Empress Eugenie, wife of Napoleon III. The famous *monogram* products were made in 1896, of which a pattern was composed of the initials of Louis Vuitton and a Japanese family crest. During this time there was a boom of Japanese influence in Paris that spread after the Paris Universal Exposition of 1868. Louis Vuitton is considered a time-honoured French bag, fulfilling the status of buying a high-class bag. Attaining such a bag would become one purpose for overseas trips. At the beginning of the 1970s, it was reported in a French media outlet that many Japanese tourists waited in line in front of the main Louis Vuitton store in Paris. This news illustrates the Western European brand boom for Japanese people in this period.

<sup>10</sup> The price of *Vogue* then was 300 francs, though *ELLE* was 15–20 francs.

<sup>11</sup> Marie Quant first shortened the dress in 1963 (Baudot 1999, 189).

<sup>12</sup> According to the *Compendium of Foreign Companies* published by Toyo keizai shinbunsha (29 April 1999), each luxury brand income report in 1997 was as follows: Louis Vuitton 17.5 billion yen, Hermes 5 billion yen, Gucci 4.3 billion yen, and Chanel 2.8 billion yen.



### **Context of the first Western European fashion high-class brand boom in 1970s Japan**

The first reason for this trend in the 1970s was the realisation of a capitalist society, high economic growth, and establishment of a middle class (through consumption). To truly understand the situation in the 1970s, we must also consider the 1960s. In the 1960s, the Ikeda government declared a plan for doubling income (所得倍増計画). Japanese society became a real capitalist society. The growth of Japanese consumption supported this realisation of high economic growth. But how was consumption promoted in 1960s Japan? To answer that question, we could point out the following.

First, there was growth in the number of salaried workers belonging to the new middle class. Through the development of an industrial society, the new middle class (shin churyu kaikyū 新中流階級) appeared and progressed, while the farm worker, craftsman, and merchant all decreased in number (Ishikawa 1982, 16).

Second, sociologist Akihiko Ishikawa also indicates that after WWII, Japanese trade unions tried to reduce the difference in conditions between middle-class white-collar and blue-collar workers, especially through technological innovation and increased educational levels (ibid., 35).

The increase in people feeling that they belonged to middle-class society encouraged consumption because wage gaps were closed. Meanwhile, consumption and hobbies became standardised among Japanese people in the 1960s. Michiko Naoi, Japanese sociologist, explains the reason for this growth in Japanese who identified themselves as middle class: Life with ‘the house, bath, telephone, and refrigerator was considered the life of the middle class’. That is, consumption became a barometer to judge the class to which Japanese people belonged (Naoi 1979, 372).

In the 1960s, to belong to the middle class, Japanese people tried to buy the same things. The first three sacred treasures (三種の神器 Sansyu no sinki) were a television, washing machine, and refrigerator. The next three sacred treasures were a colour television, car, and air conditioner. These were the necessary commodities. After everybody had these commodities, they started to spend their money on luxuries. Thus, in the 1960s–1970s, consumption of luxury items was a way of belonging to the middle class (Ishikawa 1982, 44–5).

This type of luxury consumption promoted overseas travel in Japan. Forty hours of work per week and two days of holiday per week favoured a hobby boom and encouraged leisure travel. Overseas trips were promoted particularly after April 1964, when the Japanese could freely leave Japan. Travel abroad peaked in the 1970s (Leblanc 2000, 181). Thus, in Japan then, consumption became part of the middle class as society moved away from necessities towards leisure and hobby.

### **Fashion magazine *Anan***

Reflecting this social context, the fashion magazine *Anan* was first published in 1970. *Anan*, licensed by the French fashion magazine *ELLE*, no longer presented sewing tips like *Soen*. *Anan* is presented as a lifestyle from which the reader can buy clothes and accessories. It can be said that *Anan* is the model of an actual Japanese fashion magazine.

The first *Anan* featured 'A Trip to France'. In the first photo of this article, mixed Japanese and European model Yuri is shown in Charles De Gaulle Airport at the Air France counter with a Louis Vuitton bag. In the second picture, she is walking down the Avenue des Champs-Élysées, one of the most visited streets in Paris, while carrying a Louis Vuitton bag. The subtitle reads 'Go to Paris'. Using this Japanese-European fashion model, Yuri, the magazine invites readers to project themselves: to make them feel as though they were on the same street and to provoke their desire to go to Paris.

The second *Anan* featured an article entitled 'A Souvenir of Paris'. On this page, Yuri is shown buying many Louis Vuitton monogram bags. In this feature, we can easily find the Louis Vuitton bag. This type of article was conditioned by the Japanese social context, such as the realisation of high economic growth allowing the purchase of European luxury and travel abroad. At the same time, this discourse reinforces/legitimises this realisation.

Since then, Japanese people, who could not go abroad in general and had to 'imitate' French fashion found in dressmaking magazines, have started to be able to go to France to buy authentic fashion products. But even if Japanese people have started to possess the same Louis Vuitton monogram bags as French people, it could be said that the significance of Louis Vuitton has been acculturated: in France the bags are a *high quality brand for the elite and rich*, but in Japan, it is these *consumer goods* that permit them to belong to middle class. Thus for Japanese people, the Louis Vuitton bag is *ostentatious consumption* in the term of Thorstein Veblen; it does not permit them to belong to a higher class but helps them to modernise and develop Japan as an individual creating a middle class.

### ***Western fashion high-class brand boom at end of 1990s in Japan***

After 1994, after the second Western fashion high-class brand boom during the economic bubble of the 80s, a third such boom appeared. The import brand market in 1999 was 30 million yen more than in 1989 during the economic bubble. Why after 1994 did the Western fashion boom re-emerge? What was the social context of the 1990s? We could hypothesise two reasons (Leblanc 2000, 207).

### ***Depreciation of the yen***

Though the economic bubble burst in 1991, the consumption of European luxury brand bags was already developed. The first reason could be the depreciation of the

yen. In 1985, the Plaza Accord was accepted between Japan and the USA during the G5 meeting at Plaza Hotel in New York City. To decrease the US trade deficit, countries that had a trade surplus, such as Japan, had to raise the rate of dollars. This intervention caused the depreciation of the yen and a growth in imports. In 1986, imports were stronger than exports in Japan, but in 1992, the depreciation of European currency provoked the growth of imports again.

*Lost decade in Japan in 1990s caused two types of consumption*

On the one side, consumption of high-class brand bags was favoured by the growth of unemployment because such bags helped people to feel a sense of belonging to a group. The Japanese people could not depend on a company, but they could depend on a brand to keep them in the group they belonged to. What is more, they thought that in the long run buying an expensive, high-class luxury bag was more economical than buying a cheaper bag that would last only a short time.<sup>13</sup> We should also note the arrival of Japanese imitations of Western brands as a reason: cheap Japanese fashion products (like the Japanese fashion boutique Uniquro (ユニクロ) became popular during the recession.<sup>14</sup>

**Louis Vuitton presented  
in Japanese fashion magazines in 1999**

When considering the Japanese social context of 1999, we can consider how the Louis Vuitton bag was presented. The way of presenting the Louis Vuitton bag in 1999 was not the same as the New Look era nor was it identical to the first Louis Vuitton boom. We examined eight representative Japanese fashion magazines published in 1999 for an audience of women aged 40–50 years, three for women aged 20–30 years, and two for teenagers. Among them, we found five featured articles regarding Louis Vuitton. The ages of the audience varied from teenagers to 30–40-year-old women.

**Formation of desire by models as mirror of readers**

In this era, many magazines were prone to present each model in such a way that readers could project themselves more than ever before. We now consider some of these features.

<sup>13</sup> *Asahi shinbun* evening newspaper, 5 December 1998.

<sup>14</sup> After the Lehman shock, deflation was provoked in Japan. In 2010, depreciation of the yen again favoured trips abroad and buying European luxury bags (morning edition of *日本経済新聞* [*Japan Economic News Paper*] dated 18 October 2010).

***Grazia***<sup>15</sup>

In the magazine *Grazia*, most of articles allude to not liking to get old. *Grazia* presented a featured article on Louis Vuitton in a two-page spread in April 1999. On the left page of this article for women 30–40 years old, famous Japanese actress Kuroki Hitomi, who is in the same generation as most *Grazia* readers, holds a Louis Vuitton bag, wears Louis Vuitton clothing, and says, ‘I love Louis Vuitton’. On the right page, several Louis Vuitton products are presented. Kuroki Hitomi is presented: ‘Her name is Ms. Kuroki Hitomi and she is becoming more beautiful with age’. With this presentation, this model corresponds to the ideal image of *Grazia* readers. She affirmed in the article: ‘The monogram bag of Louis Vuitton is splendid, but it seems that there are few women suited for this bag. Now Louis Vuitton is all for me’. The editor of this article appealed to the desire of the readers by showing the model’s discourse. Readers around 40 years old hope to age as beautifully as reflected in this actress’s image. They hope to realise her ideal image by using the Louis Vuitton bag as a way of staying young.

***With***<sup>16</sup>

*With*, a Japanese fashion magazine for working women 20–30 years of age, featured a two-page article on Louis Vuitton in December 1998. The title is ‘Louis Vuitton, it is the best, I love it!’ The subtitle of the featured article is ‘You could carry this bag every day because the Louis Vuitton bag has a big storage space’.

On the right page, an anonymous model who looks like most working women in their twenties presents Louis Vuitton while walking in the business district; on the left, several Louis Vuitton bags are presented. With the titles, this model appears to be an accessible and realisable ideal model for the reader, working women in their twenties. In this article, there is a new signification for Louis Vuitton bags: the bag for young Japanese working women is Louis Vuitton.

***JJ***<sup>17</sup>

*JJ* is a magazine designed for female university students aged 18–22. Some readers are featured as models for their favourite Louis Vuitton bag. In April 1999, *JJ* published a six-page feature article on Louis Vuitton bags. The title of this article was ‘Is Your Vuitton the Latest Model?’ In this article, several readers (students)

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<sup>15</sup> Circulation of magazine *Grazia* in 1999: 150,000 copies.

<sup>16</sup> Circulation of *With* magazine in 1999: 632,000 copies.

<sup>17</sup> Circulation of *JJ* magazine in 1999: 150,000 copies.

are presented as models holding their own Louis Vuitton bag. One of the readers, a second-year student at university commented as follows: 'I have had my Louis Vuitton monogram bag for four years. It is so practical that I take it everywhere. I will never change my opinion'.<sup>18</sup> Here, the Louis Vuitton bag is signified as a practical bag for university students.

### *Cawaii*<sup>19</sup>

The Japanese fashion magazine *Cawaii*<sup>20</sup> for teenagers used upper secondary school students as models to present their favourite Louis Vuitton bags. The featured article of *Cawaii* published on March 1999 comprises three pages. The title is 'My Louis Vuitton Bags: I am proud of them!' The captions are composed of comments from real upper secondary school student readers who function as the story's models: 'When I was a first-year student at lower secondary school and succeeded on an exam, my parents gave me my first Louis Vuitton monogram bag'. This story makes the bag accessible to the magazine's readers. Moreover, the model with her Louis Vuitton bag represents a similar image to the reader, making the reader more able to imagine having a Louis Vuitton. It could even become a kind of obsession to own the same Louis Vuitton as the magazine's models. Such a model could be said to be more influential on the readers than 'real' models or actresses.

To better understand how Louis Vuitton is presented in Japanese magazine articles, we compared them to some French magazine articles. We used French fashion magazines such as *Vogue*, *ELLE* and *Depeche Mode* published in 1999. We could find only one page in *Vogue* (published in March 1999) that used a Louis Vuitton monogram bag as decoration for a swimwear special. We could not find any teenage models presenting Louis Vuitton bags. We could not find any additional words about Louis Vuitton, except 'Louis Vuitton' in titles, either.

In examining Japanese fashion magazines, the practice of presenting Louis Vuitton with models similar to the readers is a way to increase readers' desire for Louis Vuitton bags. Louis Vuitton could be accessible to the reader through each model in the Japanese fashion magazines. In contrast to the French magazines, the Japanese magazines emphasise Louis Vuitton bags as a suitable brand of bag for readers of every generation.

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<sup>18</sup> *JJ*, April 1999.

<sup>19</sup> Circulation of *Cawaii* magazine in 1999: 225,000 copies.

<sup>20</sup> *Cawaii*, March 1999.

## Conclusion

As we have shown, just after the defeat of WWII, the appearance of Japanese women was influenced by articles from *Soen* blindly promoting the New Look as French fashion. This encouraged dressmakers and weavers to use the New Look to explicitly modernise Japan. When economic growth was realised in the 1970s, buying a real Louis Vuitton bag as a French luxury item in France was an ostentatious device of modernisation-westernisation and a way of showing that one belonged to the middle class. Japanese society then tried to attain a Western level and go beyond it. In contrast, articles published about Louis Vuitton in 1999 did not present French features as before. Instead they illustrated the relevance of Louis Vuitton bags in the context of each generation. In the final case, westernisation-modernisation was not expressed explicitly but was self-evident. Without explaining this consumption of a Western brand as globalisation, magazines presented several ways of localising this Western brand bag for all generations.

Thus, modernisation after WWII in terms of Japanese fashion could be described as the localisation of Western fashion, the manner in which Western fashion was accepted and acculturated developed according to Japanese social contexts. Accordingly, fashion was one device used for constructing the identity of a westernised Japan.

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KYOKO KOMA, Ph.D. (kyokokoma@hotmail.com), research fellow at the Centre for Asian Studies of Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas; associate professor at Department of Foreign Languages, Institute of Humanities of Mykolas Romeris University, Vilnius

✉: Buivydiškių 11–125, LT-07177 Vilnius, Lithuania