



Designing Thai Fabric Fashion for Exporting to Japan

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Abstract

Attires, in addition to a protection of human body, are non-verbal language of a kind which can reflect personalities, tastes and status. The different tastes for fashion are influenced by different factors, which can be classified into 2 types: natural and non-natural ones. The former includes the climate, terrain and body shapes. The latter includes the culture, tradition and believes. This preliminary study found that Japan is a country, which is unique in terms of the fashion and attire culture. Japanese women prefer products with creative designs as reflected in handicrafts. Internationally, Japan is recognized as a country, which gives priority to the fashion. Therefore, various fashion products are prevalent for different consumer groups in Japan and, thus, Japan is a promising market. In this article, cultural and non-cultural factors to Japanese attires of urban women are discussed. These include body shapes, bodypart lines and weather. From the analysis, it is found that these factors have influence on the fashion design on personalities, lengths, silhouettes and color schemes.

Thai woven fabrics as handicraft products are internationally well-known and exported for years. However, the market share has still been limited because of its designs. This paper aims at investigating the factors that influence on Japanese women's preferences for fashion products and at proposing designs, which are suitable for Japanese women.

This paper is expected to contribute to the fashion design courses offered by various institutes in Thailand and current students in this field and to the fashion and fashion-related, textile, garment entrepreneurs whose market is Japan and those who are interested in Japanese market.

Key words: Japanese Fashion Market, Japanese Fashion Personality

Introduction

Nowadays it cannot be denied that most countries depend more and more on exports which are also an indicator of the country economic potentialities. For Thailand, apart from agricultural products, industrial products are important exports, for examples, computer equipments, car parts, jewelleryes, textile

and garment etc. Among these, it can be claimed, textiles and garments are famous at the international level and their manufacturing requires more complicated processes.

As regards the textile and garment industries, Thai fabrics are internationally renowned in terms of their quality and beauty, especially the hand-woven

ones, for examples, silk and cotton. For 2 decades, the demand for different fabrics has increased and, to meet such a demand, there are more manufacturers of different scales, that is, large, medium and small. These also result in the mass production of Thai fabrics. However, inspite of the promotion by related state agencies, for instances, the Department of Sericulture, Ministry of Agriculture, Department of International Trade Promotion of Ministry of Commerce and National Institute of Sericulture, the export values of hand-woven fabrics are quite low in comparison with other kinds of fabrics. According to Ms. Supawadee Yamkamol, Head of Fashion Product Group, Export Promotion Bureau, Department of International Trade Promotion, Ministry of Commerce, the main obstacles are the duration of production and some restriction on the raw material import, that is, the silk yarn.

With the reasons mentioned above, this paper investigates the factors influencing on the export business of garments and how to develop suitable designs and garments made of Thai woven fabrics in response to the overseas market.

The statistics of the exports of ready-made garments and those made of Thai woven fabrics, according to Ms. Supawadee Yamkamol, suggest that Japan is a promising market because of Japanese's high income level and their tastes for creatively designed products. Japan is also internationally recognized as a fashion leader and, therefore, a varieties of fashion styles are made availble in response to different consumer groups. In addition, the Japan-Thai Economic Partnership Agreement (JTEPA) has contributed to the increase in various trade cooperations between them. These also include fashion products.

For decades, most of the export of Thailand's ready-made garments are OEM (original equipment manufacturer), that is, the design and specification of products are controlled by the employer. In 2011, to add more value to Thai garment exports, the Department of International Trade Promotion launched the ODM policy, i.e., original design manufacturer and

this will enhance the competitiveness of Thai entrepreneurs.

Objectives and Methodology

To clearly understand the Japanese fashion, the culture of Japanese attires shall be researched. For the data, they are composed of 2 types: primary and secondary ones. For the former, it is empirical and quantitative, that is, Japanese women's street fashions were photographed. For the latter, it is qualitative, i.e., different textbooks, books and magazines were consulted. From the analysis, it is found that The factors which govern human beings' dresses can be classified into 2 types: natural and non-natural ones. The former includes climate, terrain and body shape and the latter includes cultures, beliefs and traditions etc. In collecting data of both natural and non-natural factors, 2 types of resources are used, that is, empirical and non-empirical ones. For the former, Japanese women's street fashion were photographed. For the latter, different textbooks, books and magazines were consulted.

Results and Discussion

Natural factors governing Japanese fashion styles: Basic information

Climates and weathers in Japan Geographically, Japan is composed of 4 main islands from north to south, including Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku and Kyushu and some islets. There are 4 seasons and in each seasons, the weathers are different from region to region.

Spring

Spring, the first season, starts from March to May and is marked by the bloom of cherry blossoms. Throughout this season, various festivals are held, for examples, Hanami and Golden Week. Hanami means çflower viewingé and during the very first week of blossom, Japanese take a stroll appreciating the beauty of cherry blossom. Following the Hanami comes the Golden Week, which starts by the end of April to the

first week of May. During this week, Japanese enjoy a lot of outdoor activities and overseas travels.

Summer

Summer in Japan starts from June to August and most of the regions, except for Hokkaido, are humid and hot and the temperature during the daytime is approximately 30-35 degree Celsius. The seasonal rain is welcomed by Japanese farmers. Moreover, it is the school summer vacation and that is why most Japanese people enjoy the leisure both domestically and overseas.

Autumn

Next to the bright summer is autumn, which lasts from September to November. The weather is comfortable. Maple and ginkgo leaves change to yellow. Japanese farmers are busy with their harvest of rice, fruit and vegetables.

Winter

Winter lasts from December to February with snow all over the country. It is marked with the Ice Festival in Hokkaido. However, it seems that the weather is unpredictable because of the global warming.

Figure 1 shows the temperature of each month in Japan and the gradient from winter to summer and vice versa is obvious, that is, the highest temperature is in August and the lowest in January. With this reason, the weather is a key factor, which shall be taken into account in marketing products (here clothes).

Therefore, Japanese have different clothes for each season and this is a promising factor for fashion goods.

Japanese lifestyle

The consuming habit of Japanese

Known as a perfectionist, most Japanese are meticulous and, therefore, quality is more important than price. They are willing to pay more for the better quality. This is confirmed by agricultural products sold in Japanese supermarkets, that is, apart from the freshness, the details of import sources, date of production and expire, preserving chemicals etc. must be clearly provided. As a comment says

“Japanese consumers are considered the world’s most discriminating, particularly those who have traveled overseas. Product cycles are short; preferences swing widely, especially among younger women; and Japanese consumers tend to be fanatical when it comes to quality.”

Ken Belson, New York Times

Due to the fact that Japanese prefer the public transportation to the private one, walking has become a part of their life. Therefore, Japanese prefer light, compact and durable products with modern designs because they spend more time outside their home as an interview with a young Japanese woman by New York Time shows:

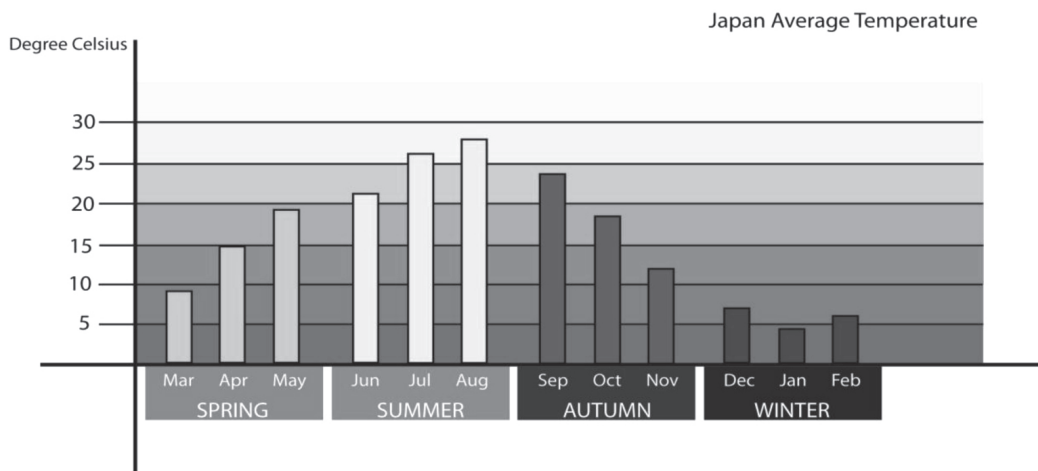


Figure 1: Japan average temperature (Degree Celsius)

“It is much better to buy one good thing and use it carefully than spend money on many cheap things. As I become busier, I don’t have as much time to shop, so I only go to places where I can get good things.”

Bicycles

As an alternative to personal cars and to save more time than walking to train or subway stations, bicycle is opted. In general, train and subway stations are not far from their residences more than 1 1/2 miles, that is, less than 15 minutes are spent. Moreover, the parking lot is provided at the station, therefore, Japanese love to ride the bicycle.

Train and subway

Due to the even higher fuel price, traffic jam and suburban living, trains and subways become other basic needs as told by a commuter to the Daily Yomiuri:

“Every morning, I was pushed and packed into the overcrowded train, so by the time I arrive at work, I’m already exhausted.”

With the conditions in their daily lives, that is, walking for a long distance, riding bicycle, and commuting in the packed train and subway, Japanese have to wear more than one layer for different weather conditions and occasions.



Figure 2: Transportation in Japan

Kimono: Japanese national gown

Kimono, both man and woman is recognized as a symbol of Japanese, especially the woman one. From the 9th to 12th century Japanese women wore 12 or more pieces of a kimono, which were very wide and flowing.

Many pieces of cloths for a kimono were tied with an obi - a narrow sash-like strip. Over the outer piece, a red hakama was worn and reached down to the ankles. Long hair was left loosely and, in some cases, a hair piece was added for the length.

Moreover, both men and women were very me-



Figure 3: Kimonos

Source: <http://www.designer.co.th/1424>

ticulous in choosing and matching the silk cloths and their colors for each season.

It is noted that Japanese have preferred thinner clothes to thick ones, that is to say, the cloths used for making kimono in the past and dresses at present are relatively thin. The amount of layers they have worn has been dependent on the different seasons and occasions.

Japanese women's body shape

In general, Japanese women have a tubular shape with the half top, that is, the breast is not so voluminous, the hip is quite straight and the figure is thin. Taking the waist line as the half of the body, the upper and lower halves are equal and the loose form of clothes are fit to this kind of figure and that is why kimono is suitable for Japanese women. To wear kimono, a support with some pieces of cloths is needed at the back of waist. With this support, the outer kimono will not wrinkle when it is fasten with the Obi strip. Moreover, the Obi shall be fastening upper from the waist line in order to correct the shape of equal halves. That is, the lower half looks longer.

From the study of kimono and the figure of Japanese women, it can be said the clothes fit for them are the loose form not the tight one. The half line should be upper from the waist to avoid the chunky look. The upper half line will correct this flaw with a taller and thinner look.

Apart from the study of Japanese lifestyles and climates, tastes and methods of dressing shall be taken into account. Therefore, the data of street fashions were gathered through the website Style-Arena JAPAN (<http://style-arena.jp>) under the Japan Fashion Association. This source has collected the data of both men and women attires in 5 major areas, Tokyo since June 2002: Ginza, Shibuya, Daikanyama, Omote-Sando and Harajuku. The data collection has been conducted every week and 30 pictures have been taken each week. For this research, only the data of women have been collected for 1 year from March 2013 -

February 2014. They are divided into 4 seasons and the total number of pictures is 1,147 as follows:

1. Spring season : March 2013 - May 2013
299 persons
2. Summer season : June 2013 - August 2013
290 persons
3. Autumn season : September 2013 - November 2013
297 persons
4. Winter season : December 2013 - February 2014
261 persons

6 components of fashion design are analysed:

1. Personalities
2. 3 body-part lines
3. Number of items
4. Length of items
5. Silhouettes
6. Colors

1. Personalities

Parsonalities can be divided into 5 types as follows: Classic, Casual, Feminine, Creative and Minimal.

Classic

For the Classic personality, people are quality-oriented and tend to choose simple but elegant clothes, which are neatly made. These make them look elegant, polite and simply chic. New trends or feminine clothes (ribbons, laces) have no influence on them. For the texture, they are made of natural yarns; bags and shoes from leathers. For the color, basic, dark and pastel colors are their favorite, for examples, black, white, grey, dark blue, khaki and beige etc. Therefore, the Classic people don't like extravagant textures or any patterns. From these characteristics, it can be assumed that the Classic group is quality-oriented and they invest in their clothes for the long-term use.

Casual

For the Casual characteristic, the people of this group are simple and function-oriented, that is, loose and easy to care. The texture shall be of the stretched, knitted and jean ones. Their clothes can be used in

different occasions. For shoes, the most favourite are sneakers, sandals and those without soles. The Casual rarely follow any fashion trend; therefore, they don't change bags or shoes, if not necessary. The factor to their decision is flexibility and practicality.

Feminine

For the Feminine group, the people tend to love clothes which show their body curves with such details as ribbons, laces pleats to express their femininity. The texture of clothes shall be soft, smooth and velvety. Flower patterns are preferred. In case of skirts, they should cover the knees or be longer. For trousers, the cloth is soft. During the cold weather, knitted jackets are their favorite choices. For the color, pastel and sweet ones are their favorite. For their shoes, the high-heel ones are their choices. They also like antique-looking accessories. All in all, it can be assumed that this group is beauty - oriented more than function-oriented.

Creative

For the Creative group, the people have high confidence; they love to express the "self" through their uniqueness. They are open to new designs, for examples, asymmetric shapes with vivid colors. Moreover, they tend to mix and match different things to create their own styles together with their make-up and hair styles, for examples, tailor-made jacket with an extra-long skirts. For them, main-stream shops are not interesting, i.e., they are not interested in what designers have matched and, because of their unique-

ness; the Creative people become fashion leaders automatically. Therefore, they are not of the function-oriented type. What they are interested in is "uniqueness".

Minimal

For the Minimal group, the people love clothes with simple designs and colors, that is, they prefer the mono-colored dresses, for examples, black, white, beiges and brown etc. Pastel colors are also their choices, for examples, greyish blue, brownish orange. Such decorative items as ruffles and frill are refused. However, for an individual, more than one personalities can get along, for examples, Feminine with Creative or Classic with Casual. One of the characteristics is more outstanding.

For the analysis of personalities, each dress will be decomposed for figuring out the personalities. Then, it will be decided for the main personality. The total number of dresses analysed is 1,147 as shown in the diagrams below.

In figure 4 the personalities of urban Japanese women are shown in each season: summer, spring, autumn and winter. It can be seen that in spring, summer and autumn, the Casual is most popular and the Classic is the second. However, in summer, the Feminine is the second-most popular. It can be seen that the popularity of the Casual and Classic are relatively equal. This implies that people love to dress politely but less formally. That is to say, the Casual personality tones down the formality of the Classic through

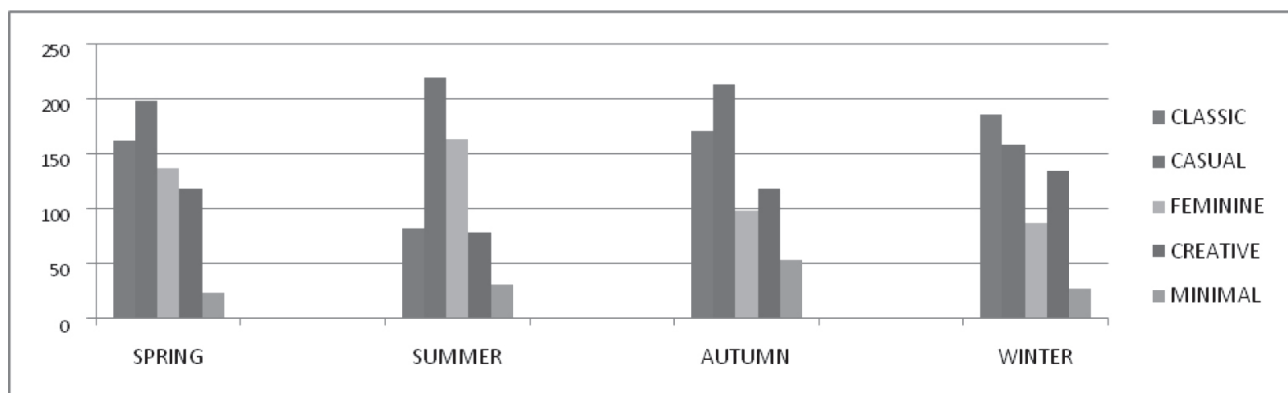


Figure 4: The Personality of urban Japanese women

some designs. It is noted that, in summer, only thin jackets are preferred. In summer, the diagram shows that the Classic personality drops significantly but become most popular in winter. This is because people, in winter, normally wear many pieces with a coat, which is a major component of Classic. Therefore, it can be assumed that çcoaté is the key factor to the Classic personality.

2. Body Part Lines

For women, the body curve is the key component of beauty and the curve consists of 3 body part lines: underchest, waist and hip. These 3 lines play the important roles for the beauty of clothes. Due to the fact that each individual has different porportions of these 3 lines, their suitability of dressing is also different.

From the analysis, the figure 5 shows that most urban Japanese women prefer clothes with the waist line in every season, that is, they always wear skirts or trousers at the waist lines with the shirt or blouse inside. In case of dresses, the waist line will be focused with some patterns or lines. The least popular body part line is the underchest one. In autumn and winter, it is noted that no Japanese women wear dresses with this body part line.

The data of body part line shows that the prefer-

ence for the waist line correspond to the the tubular shape of most Japanese women. Dresses with the waist line will divide the upper and lower parts of bosy equally and enhance the length of legs.

3. The number of items

The number of items depend on many factors: lifestyles, climates and tastes. Due to the fact that the cold weather in Japan is relatively long and most Japanese prefer the public transportation, they have a variety of clothes items as shown in the figure 6.

From the figure 6, it can be seen that most urban Japanese women prefer 3 items and, sometimes 4 items in autumn and winter. Only in summer, they prefer 2 items. Moreover, the figure 5 shows that 60 % of Japanese women prefer leggings in winter. This is perhaps a protection from the cold weather. It is noted that, instead of long trousers, they tend to wear leggings with shorts, skirts and dresses.

4. The Length of Items

Length is another important component of proportion, space and line in fashion design. The length of upper body items (shirts, blouses) can be divided into 6 levels: chest, waist, upper hip, hip, thigh and knee. The length of lower-body items is divided into 5 levels: micro, mini, knee, midi and maxi as shown in the pictures below:

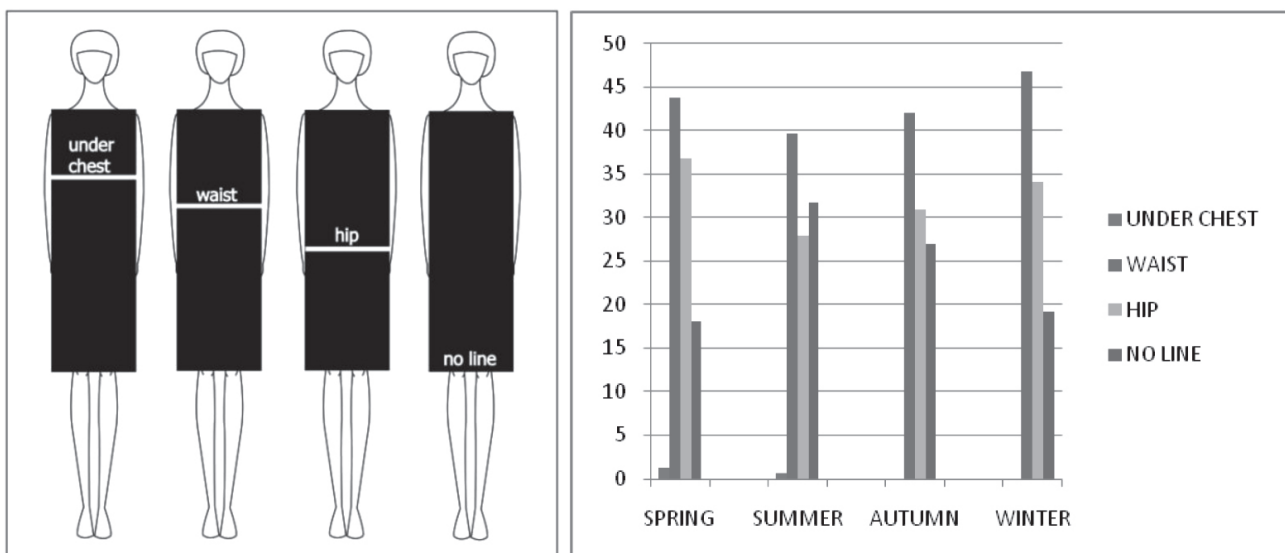


Figure 5: The body part lines

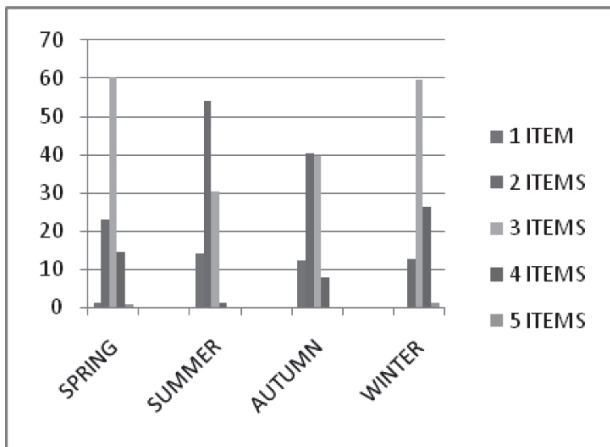


Figure 6: The number of clothes items (%)

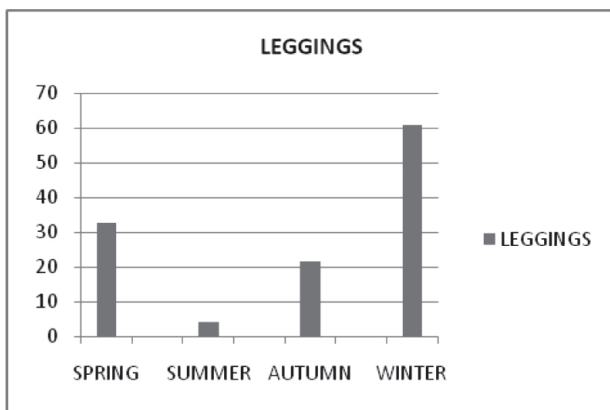


Figure 7: The number of people wearing leggings (%)

From 1,147 samples, they are classified into top (blouses, shirts), jackets (brazers, coats, cardigans), skirt, trousers and dress in each season as shown in the Figure 10-14

4.1 Blouse / top

The figure 10 shows that Japanese women tend to wear tops inside the skirts or trousers; therefore, the length of tops cannot be known. From this preference, it implies that the waist line is significant. In case that tops are outside, the length is about the upper hip and hip in every season. The length at the underchest line is completely not popular. There are very few who wear this length of tops.

4.2 Jacket / Coat

For the length of jackets, the length at the underchest line is not popular among Japanese women in every season. In spring, the weather is mild; the jacket with the hip, upper hip and thigh length, respectively. In summer, because of the warm weather, jackets are not popular. If any, the upper-hip long jacket will be their first choice. Second to it, are the waist and hip long ones. In autumn, the upper-hip and hip long jackets are very popular. In winter, the temperature is sometimes lower than 10 C, the knee or longer jacket is popular. However, it is noted that



Figure 8: Leggings with micro mini skirts and pants (Micro mini skirt and pants with leggings)

Source: www.style-arena.jp

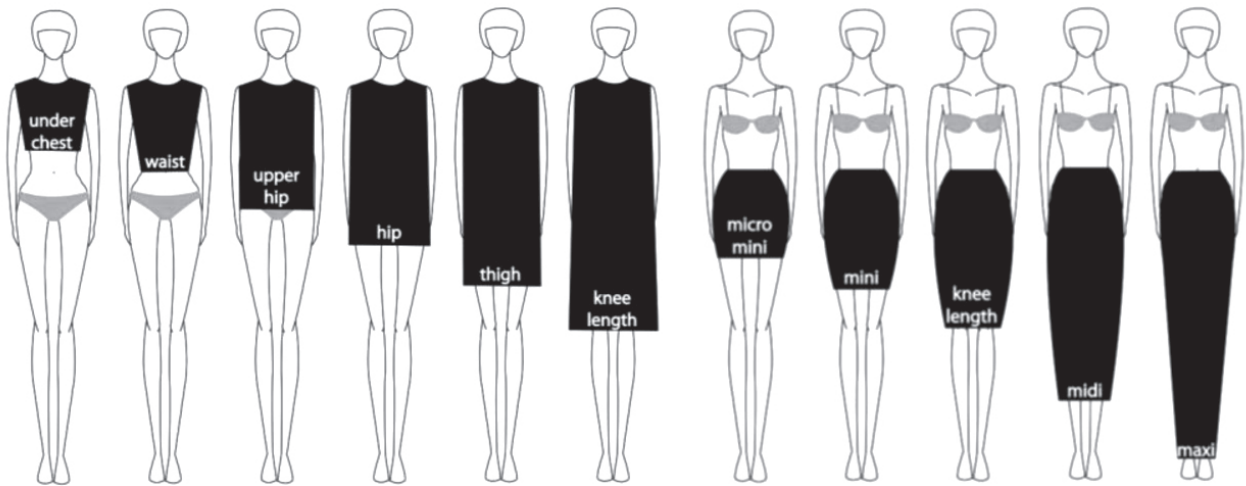


Figure 9: The Length of Items

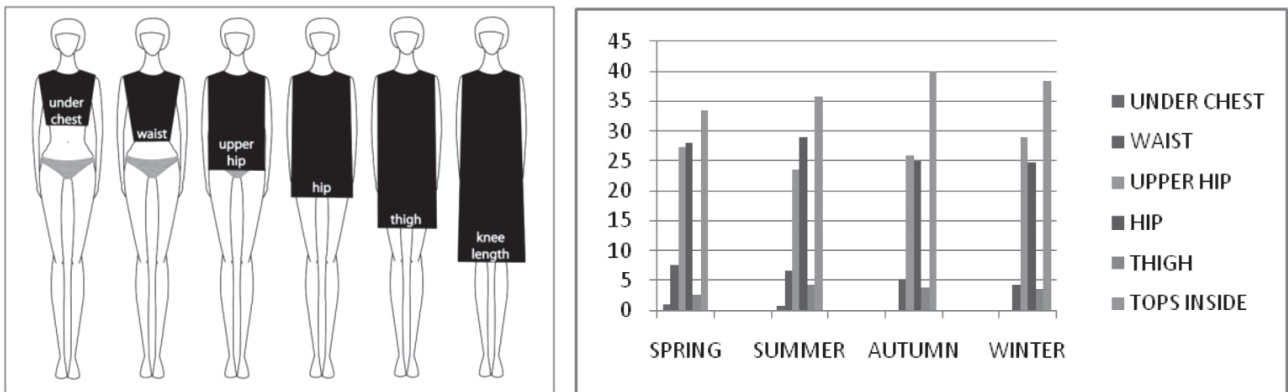


Figure 10: The length of tops

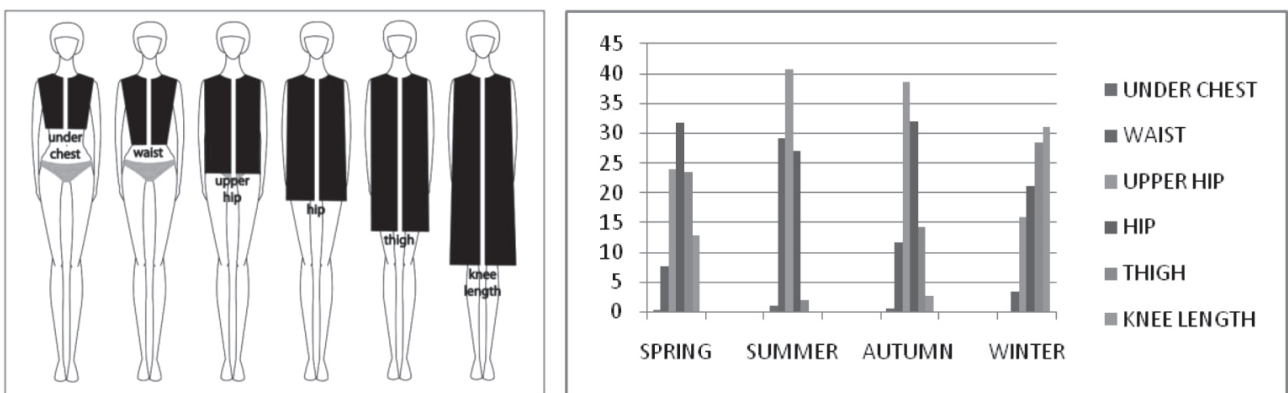


Figure 11: The length of jackets (%)

the length of jacket is relatively varied, that is, there is not one type, which is significantly popular.

4.3 Skirt

The figure 12 shows that the Micro Mini skirt is the most popular in all seasons. Second to it, comes

the Mini. For the other lengths, the popularity is not outstanding. As mentioned before, urban Japanese women tend to wear leggings with the pants and skirts instead of trousers.

4.4 Trousers

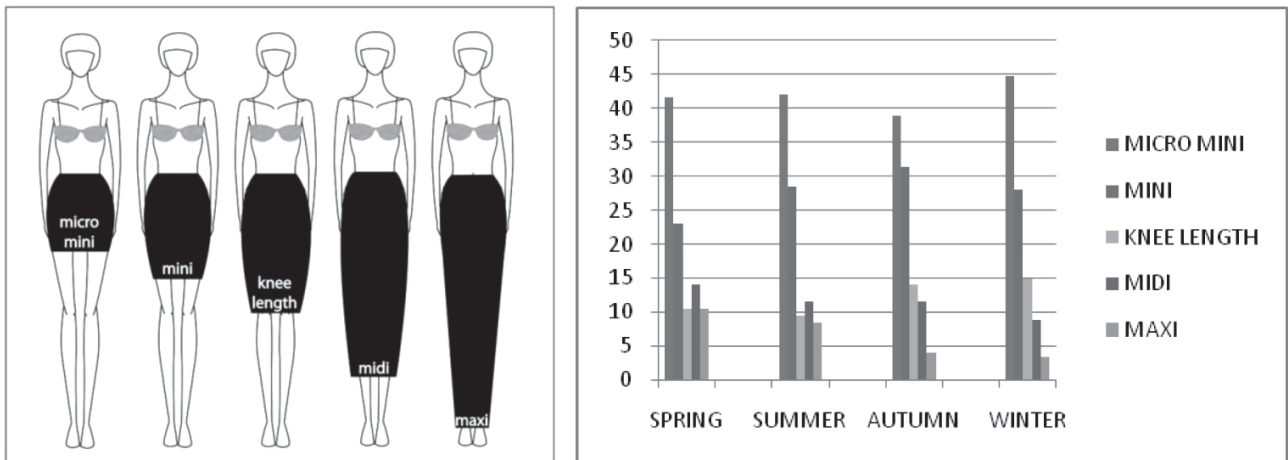


Figure 12: The length of skirt (%)

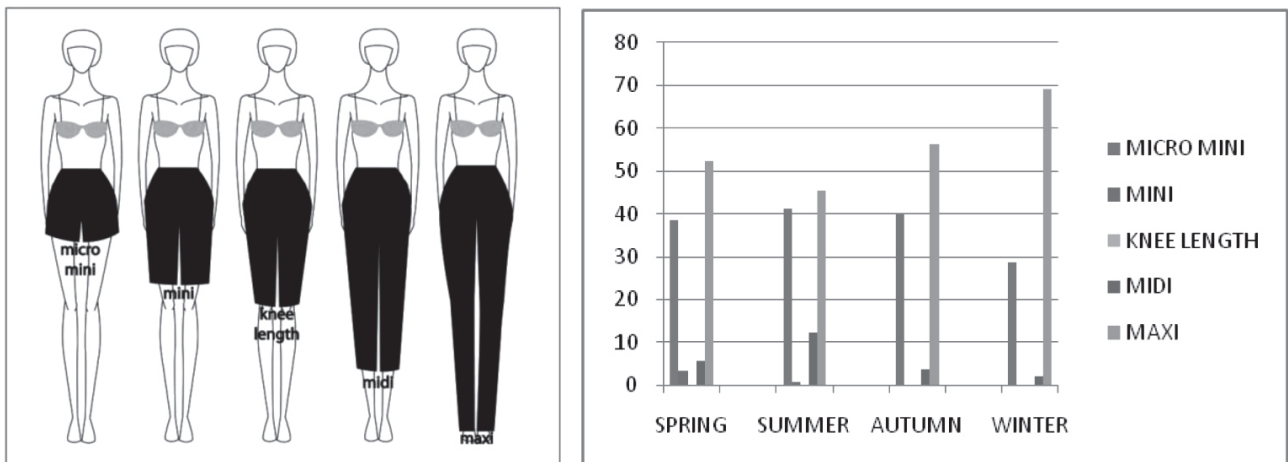


Figure 13: The length of trousers (%)

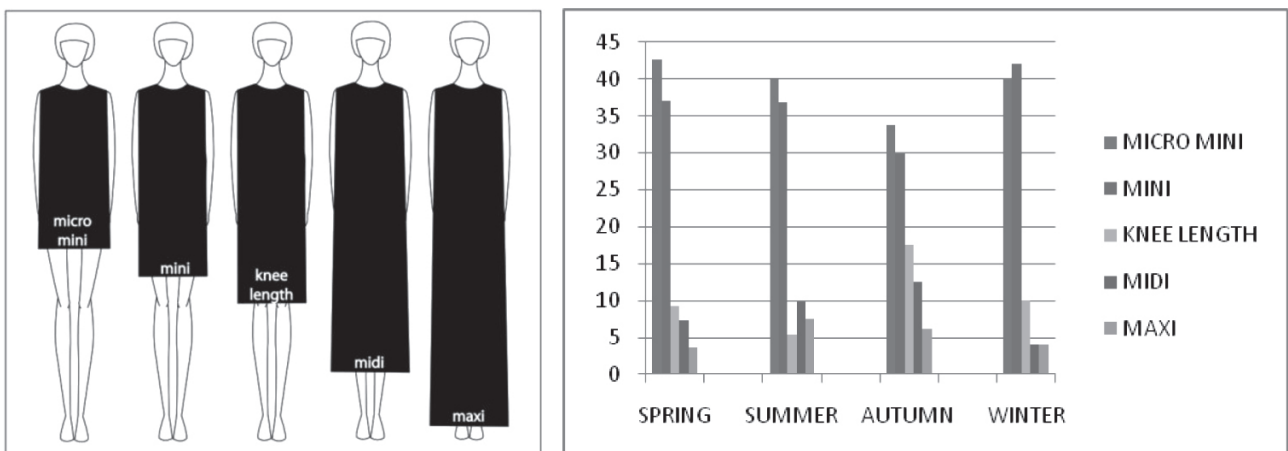


Figure 14: The length of dress (%)

For the trousers, pants, which have the same length as the Micro Mini and Maxi, are popular. Other lengths are not significant.

4.5 Dress

The figure 14 shows that, for the dress, the same length as Micro mini and Mini are the most popular in all seasons. For the other lengths, they are not significant.

From the data of different lengths above, it can be concluded that the tops' length is varied and the weather is the key factor to the length of each item. For the lower body part, the Micro Mini, Mini and Maxi lengths are the most popular in all seasons.

5. Silhouettes

In fashion design, Silhouette refers to "Shape and Form" of clothes, which can be classified based

on different criteria, for examples, the clothing history, tastes etc. For this research, due to a lot of data and samples with different tastes, 3 silhouettes are used: Tight, Fit and Loose. Tastes and designs are not taken Into account.

5.1 Blouse / Top

The figure 15 shows the popular silhouettes among urban Japanese women in each season. From the figure, it is found that Fit (more than 50%) is the most popular and Tight, which is worn inside, is not popular.

5.2 Jacket / Coat

For the jacket and coat, the figure 16 shows that "Loose" (more than 55%) is most popular in spring, autumn and winter. Second to it, is "Fit" (30-40%). For "Tight", it is not popular (5%) in every

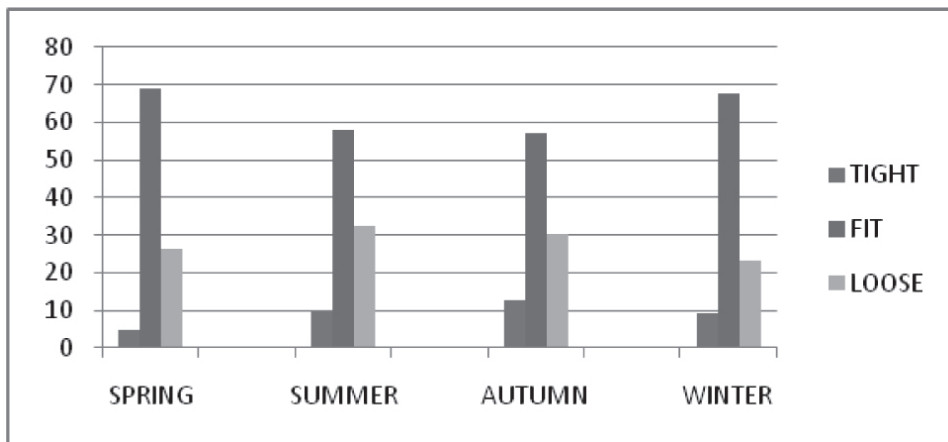


Figure 15: The silhouette of Blouse / Top (%)

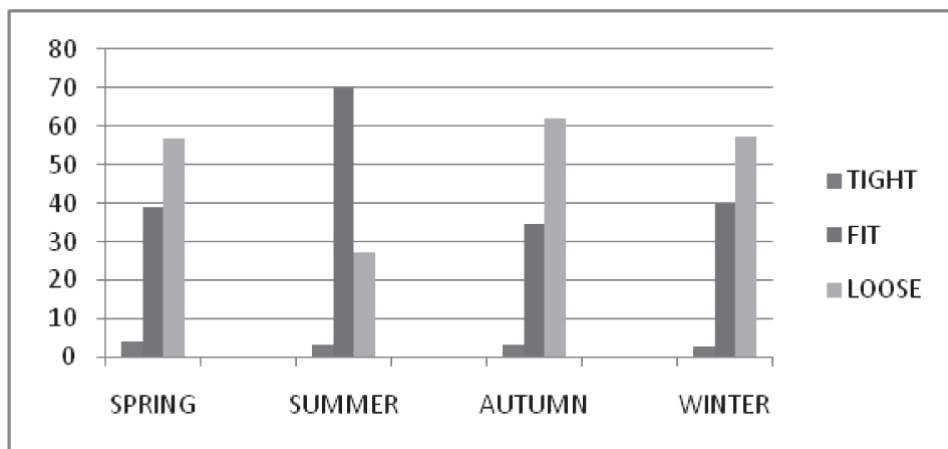


Figure 16: The silhouette of Jacket / Coat (%)

season. It is noted that the popularity of “Fit” increases to 70% in summer and “Loose” drops to less than 30%.

5.3 Skirt

The figure 17 shows that more than 50% of urban Japanese women prefer “Loose” in spring and summer. “Fit” is no less important at 41% in spring and 36% in summer. However, in autumn and winter, “Fit” is more popular than “Loose”. For the “Tight”, it is the least popular; however, it is relatively popular in autumn.

5.4 Trousers

For the trousers, “Fit” is significantly popular in every season. “Tight” and “Loose” are equally popular in almost every season. The difference between these 2 silhouettes does not exceed 12%.

5.5 Dress

The figure 19 shows the popularity of dress silhouettes among urban Japanese women. It is found that, in spring, “Fit” is the most popular (50%) and then “Loose” (45%). The difference is only 5%. “Tight” is only 5%. However, the popularity of “Fit” increase to 73% in summer and “Loose” to 21%. However, in autumn the popularity of “Fit” and “Loose” are relatively equal, 50% and 46%, respectively. It can be seen that in 3 seasons, “Fit” is the most popular; however, in winter the popularity of “Loose” increases to 54% and then “Fit” (34%). “Tight” is the least popular as ever. However, considering on the data of “Tight”, it is noted that it is most popular in winter.

From the study of “silhouette”, it is found that “Fit” is the most popular among urban Japanese women, then “Loose”. For the “Tight”, the item with

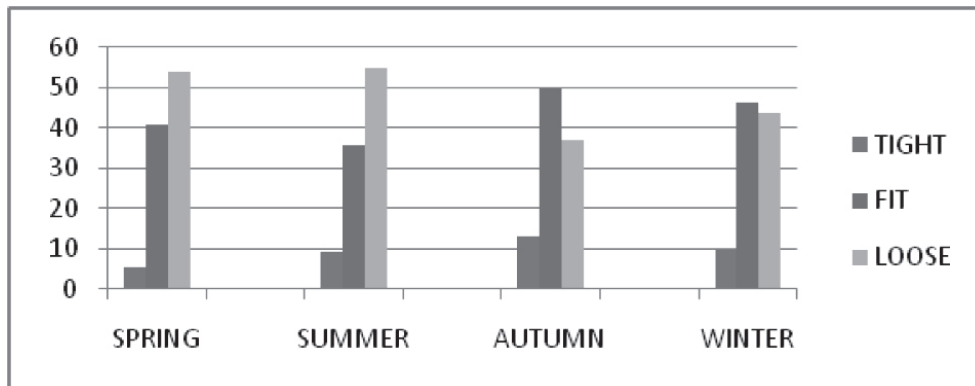


Figure 17: The silhouette of Skirt (%)

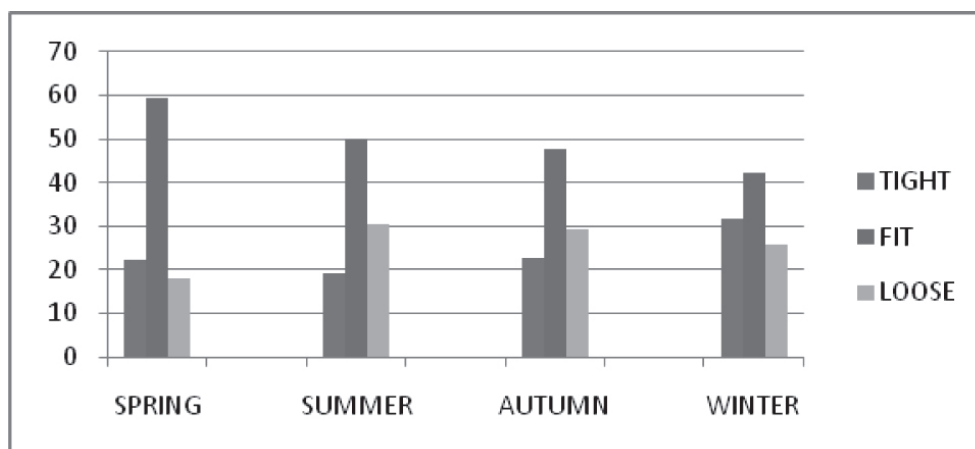


Figure 18: The silhouette of Trousers (%)

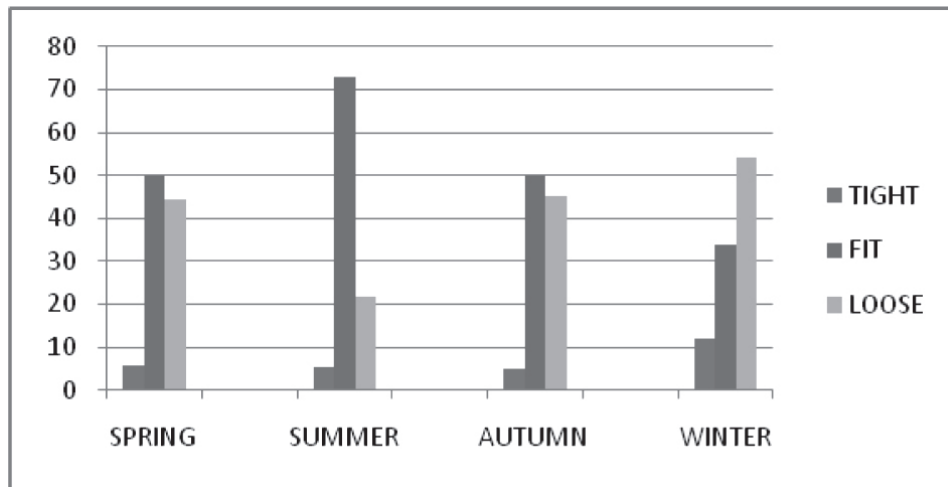


Figure 19: The silhouette of Dress (%)



Figure 20: colors

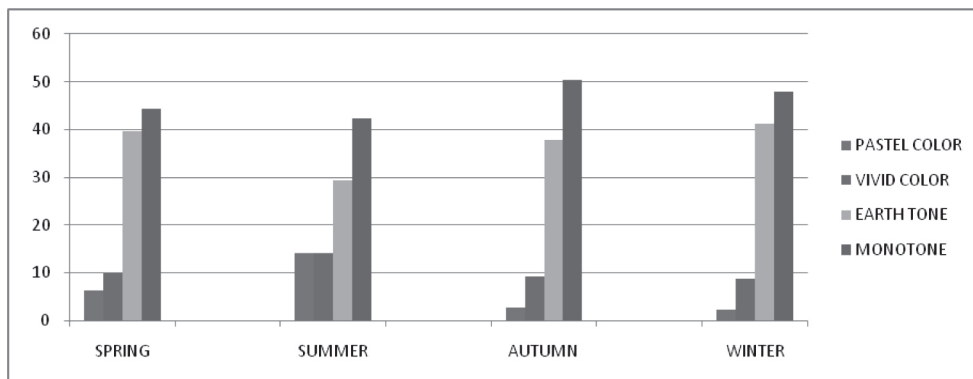


Figure 21: Popular colors (%)

“Tight” is trousers and it is the least popular. For the “Loose”, it is used for the jacket.

6. Colors

Another key factor in fashion design is color because colors can reflect the fashion personality. The can be classified into 4 schemes as follows:

- Pastel Color Schemes
- Vivid Color Schemes

- Earth Tone Color Schemes

- Monotone (Black & White) color schemes

The figure 21 shows the popularity of color schemes. It can be seen that Black & White monotone is the most popular in every season, that is, 40% of samples wear white, black and grey. The popularity increases to more than 50% in autumn. The Earth Tones come second to the Black & White. In Spring,

Black & White Monotone and Earth Tones are equally popular with only 5% difference. In the other seasons, the difference of popularity does not exceed 15%. The Pastel and Vivid color schemes increase significantly to 14% in Summer.

From the analysis of color schemes, it can be concluded that such dark tones as Black & White Monotones and Earth Tones are more popular among Japanese women. These make them look elegant. The Pastel and Vivid colors can be added through some items to make them more lively.

Conclusion

From the research of urban Japanese women's attire culture and tastes, 5 fashion personalities are found. In each season, some personalities are popular upon the weathers, that is, in spring, autumn and winter, the Casual and Classic are popular but, in sum-

mer, the Feminine is as popular as the Casual. This is because of the warmth in summer and people tend to dress casually. Moreover, the Pastel and Vivid color schemes are their choices together with the popular Black & White Monotone and Earth Tones. As for the body part lines, the most popular is the waist line. Then come the Hip and No-line. The Under Chest is not popular at all. For the length, they are varied upon the weather, that is, the tops are upper-hip and hip long. For the lower body part, the skirt, pants and dress with the Micro mini and Mini length are popular. For the silhouette, "Fit" is the most popular and comes the Loose. The Tight is not popular and it is the silhouette of trousers. For the colors, Black & White Monotone and Earth Tone are popular. Other color schemes can be added for creativity but they are not the main colors.

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