

CULTURAL TRADITION AS INSPIRATION FOR CONTEMPORARY FASHION: THE INFLUENCE OF THE JAPANESE KIMONO ON NIGERIAN DESIGN

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Abstract

This paper explores the cross-cultural influence of Japanese kimono traditions on contemporary Nigerian fashion. It demonstrates how Nigerian designers have adopted the kimono's distinctive silhouette—characterized by wide sleeves and straight-lined forms—while also incorporating traditional Japanese textile techniques such as *shibori* (tie-dye) and *sashiko* (decorative stitching) alongside indigenous methods including Adire dyeing, Aso Oke weaving, and Akwete textile production. The study further examines the creative integration of kimono elements, such as obi belts and layered construction, with iconic Nigerian fabrics including Adire, Ankara, Aso Oke, and Akwete. This qualitative research employed participant observation and desk-based methods for data collection. Findings indicate that contemporary Nigerian fashion shows and designer collections increasingly feature these hybrid styles, signaling both admiration for Japanese aesthetics and a broader trend toward global cultural exchange. This synthesis enhances aesthetic diversity, fosters intercultural dialogue, and illustrates how globalization shapes the evolution of fashion identities. Ultimately, the influence of the Japanese kimono exemplifies the dynamic exchange of cultural traditions that continues to inspire and transform contemporary Nigerian fashion.

Keywords: Japanese Kimono, Nigeria Fashion, contemporary fashion, Cultural tradition.

Introduction

Cultural traditions have long served as reservoirs of inspiration for contemporary fashion, driving designers to explore and reinterpret heritage aesthetics in modern contexts. In the increasingly interconnected world, cross-cultural exchanges have become a vital aspect of fashion innovation, leading to global dialogues that transcend geographic and historical boundaries (Craik, 2009). One notable example of this phenomenon is the influence of the Japanese kimono on Nigerian fashion, a dynamic interplay that highlights the creative potential of cultural hybridity.

The Japanese kimono, with its iconic T-shaped silhouette, broad sleeves, and intricate textile artistry, stands as a symbol of Japanese identity, tradition, and craftsmanship (Dalby, 2001). Traditionally, the kimono is not merely a garment but a representation of social status, occasion, and cultural values, often adorned with motifs and patterns that carry symbolic significance. Over the past several decades, designers worldwide have looked to the kimono for inspiration, adapting its forms and techniques to suit contemporary tastes and diverse cultural settings.

In Nigeria, a country celebrated for its vibrant textile heritage and rich traditions, the adoption and adaptation of the kimono have generated a compelling narrative of global cultural fusion. Nigerian designers have skilfully reimagined the kimono's characteristic features, such as its straight lines, loose fit, and wide sleeves, by integrating them with indigenous fabrics like Ankara, Aso Oke, and Adire (Oyeniyi, 2015) and lately Akwete. Moreover, traditional Japanese textile processes, including *shibori* (a form of resist dyeing) and *sashiko* (decorative reinforcement stitching), have found resonance among Nigerian designers, who blend these techniques with local dyeing and weaving methods to produce garments that are simultaneously global and local in their aesthetic (Akinwumi, 2008).

This creative synthesis is most visible on various social media platforms (Instagram blogs, Facebook pages, X, Tik-tok and others), Nigerian runways and in contemporary fashion collections, where kimono-inspired garments are fashioned for both everyday wear and special occasions. The presence of the obi—a traditional Japanese sash—has been reinterpreted using bold Nigerian textiles, while the layering of garments, another hallmark of kimono dressing, complements the dramatic styling often favoured in Nigerian fashion shows. Such hybrid designs are not only evidence of the admiration for Japanese aesthetics but also reflect broader trends of globalization, identity negotiation, and the democratization of fashion (Eicher & Sumberg, 1995).

Ultimately, the influence of the Japanese kimono on Nigerian fashion exemplifies the dynamic exchange of cultural traditions that propels innovation and enriches the global fashion landscape. By blending motifs, techniques, and philosophies from disparate cultural origins, Nigerian designers contribute to a vibrant dialogue that shapes new expressions of contemporary identity.

Problem of the study

Despite the increasing visibility of Japanese-inspired designs in Nigerian fashion, there is a lack of comprehensive scholarly analysis regarding the depth, mechanisms, and implications of this cross-cultural influence. Most existing literature on Nigerian fashion focuses predominantly on the preservation and evolution of indigenous styles or on Western influences, often overlooking the nuanced integration of Asian aesthetics, particularly those of the Japanese kimono. This oversight creates a gap in understanding how and why Nigerian designers selectively appropriate kimono elements, and to what extent these incorporations influence cultural identity, creative processes, and consumer perceptions in Nigeria's fashion industry. Furthermore, the impact of such cross-cultural adaptation on traditional Nigerian textile practices and the broader discourse on cultural authenticity remains underexplored.

Research questions

1. Does the integration of kimono features enrich or dilute indigenous Nigerian fashion heritage?
2. How do designers navigate the balance between innovation and respect for cultural origins?
3. What does this fusion mean for the global representation of Nigerian fashion?

Theoretical framework

The analysis of how cultural traditions, such as the Japanese kimono, inspire contemporary Nigerian fashion is grounded in theories of cultural exchange, hybridity, and appropriation. These frameworks help explain the processes by which cultural elements are transmitted, transformed, and re-contextualized in new environments. They also guide the exploration of power dynamics, creativity, and identity in cross-cultural fashion interactions. Cultural Diffusion Theory, Propounded by Edward B. Tylor (1871) Primitive Culture.

Cultural diffusion theory posits that elements of culture—such as dress, technology, or beliefs—spread from one society to another through contact, migration, or trade. In the context of fashion, this theory explains how the kimono, rooted in Japanese tradition, can be adopted and adapted by Nigerian designers.

Hybridity Theory Propounded by Homi K. Bhabha (1994) *The Location of Culture*. Hybridity theory describes the creation of new cultural forms resulting from the mixing of different traditions. In fashion, hybridity is seen when designers combine elements from multiple cultures (e.g., kimono forms with Nigerian fabrics), resulting in innovative and unique styles.

Cultural Appropriation and Appreciation theory propounded by James O. Young (2005). The concept distinguishes between appropriation (the unacknowledged or insensitive adoption of elements from another culture) and appreciation (respectful and informed integration). This theoretical lens is crucial in evaluating whether the use of kimono features in Nigerian fashion is respectful and enriching or exploitative.

These theoretical perspectives provide a robust foundation for analyzing the influence of Japanese kimono on Nigerian fashion, encompassing questions of cultural exchange, identity, creativity, and ethical engagement.

Literature review

Japanese kimono

The kimono, a traditional Japanese garment, holds a prominent place in the cultural and historical tapestry of Japan. Its origins can be traced back to the Heian period (794–1185), when the *kosode*, a precursor to the kimono, was worn as an undergarment by the aristocracy (Dalby, 2001). Over the centuries, the kimono evolved in both form and function, reflecting changes in Japanese society and aesthetics.

During the Edo period (1603–1868), the kimono became the principal item of clothing for men and women across all social classes. The introduction of intricate dyeing and weaving techniques, such as *yuzen* and *shibori*, allowed for more elaborate and expressive designs (Milhaupt, 2014). Kimonos during this time were not only garments but also indicators of social status, marital status, and even political allegiance.

The Meiji Restoration (1868–1912) marked a period of rapid modernization and Western influence. While Western dress became increasingly popular, the kimono remained an important symbol of national identity and was reserved for formal occasions, ceremonies, and festivals (Dalby, 2001).

Traditional kimonos are often made from silk and feature delicate, nature-inspired motifs like cherry blossoms, cranes, and bamboo. The patterns and colours can signify seasons, marital status, or rank, and are chosen for their refined, symbolic beauty. The classic kimono is a T-shaped, straight-lined robe with wide sleeves and a wrapped-front design. It is carefully cinched at the waist by a wide sash called an *obi*. The formal style is meant to conceal the body's curves and create a specific, graceful form. A traditional kimono ensemble includes numerous

accessories, each with a specific purpose. These include the obi (sash), obijime (cord), tabi (split-toe socks), and specific footwear like zori or geta. Kimonos and related garments like the more casual yukata are experiencing a modern revival, with designers adapting the traditional silhouette for contemporary wear. However, wearing a traditional kimono remains a complex, highly ritualized process. Today, the kimono is celebrated as a symbol of Japanese heritage and artistry. Modern kimonos are worn primarily for special events, such as weddings and tea ceremonies. The garment continues to inspire contemporary fashion designers both within Japan and internationally (Milhaupt, 2014).



Plate 1: samples of Japanese Kimono. Source: https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&sca_esv=83fe48d8321cea54&udm.....

Nigeria fashion

Fashion in Nigeria is grounded by transnational fashion designers who have adapted Nigerian textile and fashion traditions to the styles of former colonial powers. The many ethnic groups within Nigeria each have fashion traditions that have persisted through colonization to present day.

Nigerians usually dress casually because of the hot climate. However, both formal and traditional clothing are also worn. Many African cultures have a characteristic traditional style of dress that is important to their heritage. Traditional garments worn in Nigeria include: agbada, babaringa, iro and buba, erebor and ntukwasi and many others. Nigerian fashion is celebrated for its bold, vibrant, and expressive use of colour and pattern. Fabrics like Ankara, Adire, and lace are used to create dynamic, eye-catching designs. Geometric patterns, cultural symbols, and lively motifs tell stories and convey emotion.

Nigerian fashion blends traditional and modern styles, featuring vibrant fabrics like Ankara, George, laces and indigenous fabrics for cultural events, alongside modern designs by prominent designers. It represents a diverse, multicultural identity, with distinct traditional attire from various ethnic groups such as the Yoruba Agbada, Igbo Isiagu/akwete, and Hausa Babban Riga. Modern Nigerian fashion continues to reinvent itself while maintaining cultural roots.

Nigeria's contemporary fashion scene is a vibrant fusion of tradition and innovation, reflecting the country's rich cultural heritage and dynamic modern identity. Over the past two decades, Nigerian designers have garnered international acclaim, transforming the nation's fashion industry into a formidable force on the global stage (Akinwumi, 2021).

The revival and reinterpretation of indigenous textiles and techniques stand at the heart of contemporary Nigerian fashion. Fabrics such as Ankara, Aso Oke, and Adire have been reimagined in bold, modern silhouettes, blending traditional motifs with global trends (Eze, 2022). Also Akwete of late has followed suite. Designers like Lisa Folawiyo, known for her embellished Ankara pieces, and Kenneth Ize, renowned for his vibrant Aso Oke creations, exemplify this harmonious blend.

The rise of African fashion week, Lagos Fashion Week has played a pivotal role in spotlighting Nigerian talent, providing a platform for both established and emerging designers to showcase their work to an international audience (Lagos Fashion Week, 2023 and others). This event, coupled with the growing influence of social media, has democratized fashion in Nigeria, enabling young creative to reach global markets and audiences. Nigeria hosts several prominent fashion weeks, including Lagos Fashion Week, Nigeria Fashion Week, GTCO Fashion Weekend, and Men's Fashion Week Nigeria. These events showcase a wide range of Nigerian and international designers through runway shows, exhibitions, and industry-focused master classes. Under listed below are the organizers and what they feature:

Lagos Fashion Week: Known for its focus on sustainability, brings together designers, artisans, and industry leaders for runway shows, exhibitions, and conversations.

Nigeria Fashion Week: Organized by Legendary Gold Limited, is one of Nigeria's longest-running fashion events, established to showcase creativity and provide a platform for Nigerian designers.

GTCO Fashion Weekend: A free-to-attend event organized by Guaranty Trust Holding Company, it features master classes, runway shows, and retail opportunities for fashion businesses.

Men's Fashion Week Nigeria: This is a dedicated event that focuses on African menswear, featuring runway shows, panels, and creative showcases.

Other events: Other notable events include the Beauty West Africa exhibition, the Nigerian Student Fashion & Design Week, and local editions like Bayelsa Fashion Week, Calabar fashion week and Benue Fashion Week.

Contemporary Nigerian fashion is also characterized by its inclusivity and celebration of individuality. Designers increasingly cater to diverse body types and gender expressions, challenging conventional norms and pushing the boundaries of African fashion (Ogunleye, 2020). This progressive outlook not only reflects societal shifts but also cements Nigeria's position as a trendsetter in the global fashion landscape.

Nigerian contemporary fashion is a testament to the country's creativity, resilience, and cultural pride. By marrying traditional artistry with modern aesthetics, Nigerian designers are shaping a unique narrative that continues to captivate the world.



Plate 2: models on runway in a fashion parade in Nigeria. Source: https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&sca_esv=6fa41a436cb3ef.....



Plate 3: models on runway in a fashion parade in Nigeria. Source: https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&sca_esv=6fa41a436cb3ef.....



Plate 4: models on runway in a fashion parade in Nigeria. Source: https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&sca_esv=6fa41a436cb3ef.....

The kimono in Nigeria contemporary fashion

The kimono, a traditional Japanese garment characterized by its T-shaped, straight-lined robes with wide sleeves, has found its way into Nigerian contemporary fashion as a symbol of cultural fusion and modern style. Nigerian fashion designers and enthusiasts have embraced the kimono for its versatility and aesthetic appeal, integrating it with indigenous fabrics and styles to create unique, hybrid fashion statements.

In Nigeria, the kimono has been adapted from its traditional Japanese roots to suit local tastes and climates. Designers often use vibrant Ankara prints and other African textiles to reimagine the kimono, resulting in colorful, dynamic pieces that honour both Japanese and Nigerian heritages (Okoro, 2021). The name of the garment did not change, Nigerians still retain the original name symbolizing respect to Japan heritage. This adaptation not only reflects globalization's influence on fashion but also highlights the creativity and adaptability of Nigerian designers who blend different cultural elements to appeal to a diverse audience.

Moreover, the kimono has become prominent in Nigerian street wear and casual fashion. Its loose fit and flowing silhouette offer comfort and elegance, making it a popular choice for both men and women in urban centers. According to Adeyemi (2020), the kimono style is frequently seen in Nigerian fashion weeks and social gatherings, where it is styled with traditional accessories such as head wraps or modern items like wide belts, creating a fusion that resonates with contemporary Nigerian identity.

The kimono's integration into Nigerian fashion also speaks to broader trends in the global fashion industry, where cultural exchange and reinterpretation foster innovation. As Eze (2019) notes, the kimono in Nigeria is more than a garment; it is a canvas for storytelling and cultural expression, bridging continents (Asia and Africa) and histories through fabric and form. The kimono in Nigerian contemporary fashion exemplifies the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity, local and global influences. Its popularity and continual reinvention underscore the vibrancy of Nigerian fashion and its openness to cross-cultural dialogue.

Fabrics used in constructing some Kimono styles for contemporary Fashion

1. African wax-prints (Ankara)

African wax prints are colorful, patterned fabrics that have become iconic in African fashion and culture. Made primarily from 100% cotton, but made with a blend of synthetic fabric or purely synthetic. These textiles are known for their vibrant, bold designs and are produced using a wax-resist dyeing technique. Originating from Indonesian batik methods and popularized in West Africa, African wax prints are now a symbol of identity, celebration, and creativity across the continent. They are widely used for making garments, including dresses, skirts, head wraps, and contemporary kimono styles, adding a unique and expressive touch to fashion.

2. Akwete hand woven fabric

Akwete fabric is a traditional handwoven textile from the Igbo people of Akwete town in Abia State, Nigeria. Known for its vibrant colors and bold, geometric patterns, Akwete is made using cotton or silk threads on a special loom operated mostly by women. Originally used for ceremonial attire and special occasions, Akwete fabric is prized for its durability, artistry, and cultural significance. Today, it is used in both traditional and contemporary

fashion, including garments like wrappers, dresses, and kimono-style jackets, showcasing Nigeria's rich weaving heritage.

3. Aso-oke hand woven fabric

Aso-oke is a traditional handwoven fabric originating from the Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria. Made from cotton, silk, or synthetic fibers, Aso-oke is characterized by its thick texture, vibrant colors, and intricate patterns, often featuring metallic threads. It is traditionally worn during important ceremonies such as weddings, festivals, and chieftaincy rites, typically as agbada, iro, gele, and other garments. Today, Aso-oke remains a symbol of cultural pride and heritage, and is also adapted into contemporary fashion, including modern accessories and kimono-style jackets.

4. Adire

Adire is a traditional Nigerian textile known for its distinctive hand-dyed patterns, typically in shades of indigo blue. Originating from the Yoruba people of south-western Nigeria, Adire is created using various resist-dyeing techniques such as tying, stitching, or applying wax or starch to produce intricate designs on cotton fabric. The word "Adire" means "tied and dyed" in Yoruba. Today, Adire is celebrated for its cultural heritage and artistic value, and it is used in both traditional and contemporary fashion, including modern garments like kimono jackets, dresses, and accessories.

5. Laces

Lace fabric is a delicate, decorative textile characterized by its open, intricate patterns, often created through weaving, knitting, or crocheting threads of cotton, silk, or synthetic fibers. Traditionally associated with elegance and luxury, lace is widely used for special occasions such as weddings and celebrations. In contemporary fashion, including in Nigeria, lace is popular for making dresses, blouses, and kimono-inspired garments, adding a touch of sophistication and femininity. Its lightweight, airy quality and beautiful designs make lace a favourite choice for both traditional and modern styles.

Other synthetic fabrics

6. Brocade/Atiku

These richly textured fabrics are used for more formal kimono-inspired designs. Atiku is a finely woven cotton or polyester blend often worn by men, while brocade offers a regal sheen and structure.

7. Silk and Satin

Used for their smooth texture and luxurious appearance, silk and satin are favored for evening or occasion-wear kimono styles in Nigerian fashion.

8. Chiffon and Organza

Lightweight, sheer fabrics like chiffon and organza are used for layering, especially in kimono jackets and cover-ups, providing a breezy, modern feel.

9. Plain Cotton and Crepe

Plain cotton and crepe fabrics are chosen for comfortable, everyday kimono styles, suitable for casual or office wear.

In Nigerian contemporary fashion, these fabrics are often creatively mixed, with designers incorporating bold prints, embroidery, and embellishments to create statement kimono pieces that reflect both cultural heritage and modern trends.

Kimomo inspired styles by some Nigerian Designers



Plate 5: kimomo styles made with Akwete-Igbo hand woven fabric from South-Eastern Nigeria. Source: Chudi-Duru (2025).



Plate 6: some kimono styles made with African-wax printed fabric. Source: Chudi-Duru (2025).



Plate 7: some kimonos made with African-wax printed fabric. Source: Pinterest (2025).



Plate 8: a kimono made with Aso-oke hand woven fabric of the Yoruba, South-Western Nigeria. Source: Chudi-Duru (2025).



kaybeefashionstyles.com

Plate 9: kimono styles made with Aso-oke hand woven fabric of the Yoruba, South-Western Nigeria. Source: Pinterest (2025).



Plate 10: kimono styles made with a combination of Aso-oke hand woven fabric and Adire hand dyed fabric of the Yoruba, South-Western Nigeria. Source: Chudi-Duru (2025).



Plate 11: kimono made with Aso-oke hand woven fabric of the Yoruba, South-Western Nigeria. Source: Chudi-Duru (2025).



Plate 12: kimono made with Aso-oke hand woven fabric of the Yoruba, South-Western Nigeria. Source: Chudi-Duru (2025).



Plate 13: kimono styles made with a combination of Aso-oke hand woven fabric of the Yoruba, South-Western Nigeria and African wax-printed fabrics. Source: Pinterest (2025).



Plate 14: kimono styles made with a combination of Aso-oke hand woven fabric of the Yoruba, South-Western Nigeria and African wax-printed fabrics. Source: Pinterest (2025).



Plate 15: kimono styles made with a combination of Aso-oke hand woven fabric of the Yoruba, South-Western Nigeria and African wax-printed fabrics. Source: Pinterest (2025).



Plate 16: kimono styles made with a Aso-oke hand woven fabric of the Yoruba, South-Western Nigeria. Source: Pinterest (2025).



Plate 17a: kimono style made with a combination of Aso-oke hand woven fabric of the Yoruba, South-Western Nigeria and African wax-printed fabrics. Source: Pinterest (2025).

Plate 17b: A maxi kimono style made with African wax-printed fabric. Source: Pinterest (2025).

Some Nigerian Designers that have been experimenting with Kimono styles

Here are notable Nigerian fashion designers who have adapted the kimono silhouette or style into their collections. Each has brought a unique Nigerian twist to the classic Japanese garment, often blending local fabrics and motifs with the kimono's open, flowing form.

Lisa Folawiyo (Jewel by Lisa). Internationally acclaimed designer known for innovative use of Ankara and embellishments. Kimono Adaptation: Lisa Folawiyo has created kimono jackets and robes using Ankara and Adire, mixing Japanese structure with vibrant African prints.

Deola Sagoe. Renowned for haute couture and avant-garde African fashion. Kimono Adaptation: Deola Sagoe has incorporated kimono-inspired layering and sleeves, interpreting the form with Nigerian lace and Aso-Oke fabrics.

Mai Atafo. Famous for bespoke tailoring and contemporary designs. Kimono Adaptation: Mai Atafo's collections often feature kimono-style robes and jackets, updated with Nigerian prints and clean tailoring.

Ituen Basi. Known for playful, bold designs and use of Ankara. Kimono Adaptation: Ituen Basi has produced kimono-inspired wrap jackets and dresses, often combining patchwork and embellishments reflecting Nigerian culture.

Ejoro Amos Tafiri. Popular for elegant, flowy silhouettes and draping.

Kimono Adaptation: Ejoro Amos Tafiri's "Oleku Kimono" and other pieces fuse Yoruba iro and buba styling with the kimono's loose, open shape, using silk, chiffon, and African prints.

Wana Sambo. Known for empowering, versatile women's wear. Kimono Adaptation: Wana Sambo has designed kimono jackets as wardrobe staples, blending minimalist lines with African textiles and urban aesthetics.

Andrea Iyamah. Known for bold, colourful resort wear. Kimono Adaptation: Andrea Iyamah's swimwear collections often include kimono-style cover-ups and robes in African-inspired prints.

Nkwo. Eco-conscious designer reimagining traditional forms. Kimono Adaptation: Nkwo designs "kimono dusters" using up-cycled denim and Adire, blending Japanese and Nigerian textile traditions.

Chika Chudi-Duru—an artist/designer known for the use of Akwete hand woven fabrics for clothes including Kimonos.

These designers have not merely copied the kimono but have reinterpreted it through a Nigerian lens, using indigenous fabrics (Ankara, Akwete, Adire, Aso-Oke), motifs, and craftsmanship. The kimono now appears as jackets, dusters, wraps, and dresses in contemporary Nigerian fashion, symbolizing global exchange and creative hybridity.

Lisa Folawiyo (Jewel by Lisa)

- **Collection:** *Jewel by Lisa Spring/Summer 2013 Collection* showcased at **Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week Africa 2012** featured kimono-style jackets with embellished Ankara. *JBL Resort 2016* includes kimono wrap jackets, as seen in look books and trunk shows.
- **Runway:** **MBFW Africa 2012**—Kimono jackets with bold, layered Ankara prints.

Deola Sagoe

- **Collection:** *Komole Kandids Series 2* (2018) and *Komole* collections feature kimono-inspired layering, visible in campaign imagery and private runway events.
- **Runway:** **Lagos Fashion and Design Week (LFDW) 2015/2016**—Subtle kimono sleeves and overlays in couture pieces.

Mai Atafo

- **Collection:** *Mai Atafo Kimono Collection* (launched in 2020 as part of his "Essentials" line) features both men's and women's kimono jackets.
- **Runway:** **Heineken Lagos Fashion and Design Week 2018**—Kimono jackets and tailored robes.

Ituen Basi

- **Collection:** *Love Series* and *Independence Collections* (2016–2018) showcased kimono-style wrap jackets.
- **Runway:** **Arise Fashion Week 2018**—Patchwork Ankara kimono wraps and dresses.

Ejoro Amos Tafiri

- **Collection:** *Oleku Kimono* (signature piece since 2012, present in multiple collections). *Tafiri Resort 2016*—Featured Oleku Kimono in silk and Adire.
- **Runway:** **Lagos Fashion and Design Week 2014/2015**—Oleku Kimono as a highlight piece. **GTBank Fashion Weekend 2017**—Kimono dresses and jacket styles.

Wana Sambo

- **Collection:** *Wana Sambo Woman Kimono Series* (2020)—Dedicated line of kimono jackets and dusters.
- **Runway:** **Online launch 2020** (due to pandemic, collection promoted via digital lookbooks and influencer campaigns).

Andrea Iyamah

- **Collection:** *Resort 2018* and *Resort 2020* collections feature kimono-style swim cover-ups.
- **Runway:** **Arise Fashion Week 2019**—Models wore flowing kimono robes over swim and resort wear.

Nkwo

- **Collection:** *NKWO Kimono Dusters*—Ongoing since 2017, upcycled Adire kimonos.
- **Runway:** **Lagos Fashion Week 2019**—Denim and Adire kimono dusters featured prominently.

Findings and Discussion

This study found out that global fashion landscape is a vibrant tapestry woven from diverse cultural threads, each contributing unique aesthetics, forms, and meanings. In recent years, the integration of the Japanese kimono into Nigerian fashion has emerged as a compelling example of how cultural tradition can inspire contemporary creativity. Through this cross-cultural exchange, designers face crucial questions: Does the integration of kimono features enrich or dilute indigenous Nigerian fashion heritage? How do designers navigate the balance between innovation and respect for cultural origins? And what does this fusion mean for the global representation of Nigerian fashion? Analyzing these questions reveals the complex, dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation in today's fashion world.

Enrichment or Dilution of Heritage?

The incorporation of kimono elements into Nigerian fashion is a nuanced process with both enriching and potentially diluting effects. On one hand, the kimono's flowing silhouette, wide sleeves, and sash belts have been adapted by Nigerian designers to create garments that resonate with both Japanese elegance and Nigerian vibrancy. For instance, Ankara fabrics, a hallmark of Nigerian identity, are often cut in kimono-inspired shapes, resulting in a hybrid aesthetic that is unmistakably modern yet rooted in tradition. This hybridization can be seen as an enrichment, expanding the vocabulary of Nigerian fashion, fostering innovation, and reflecting the realities of a globalized world.

However, there is a risk that excessive reliance on foreign-inspired forms could overshadow indigenous styles such as the iro and buba, agbada, or gele (Yoruba tribe) and ukwu akwa na ntukwasi and blouse (Igbo tribe). If the kimono silhouette becomes a dominant trend, it could inadvertently contribute to the erosion of specific traditional forms and their cultural meanings. The line between enrichment and dilution is therefore delicate, and each designer's approach plays a critical role in determining the outcome.

Balancing Innovation and Respect for Origins

Navigating the balance between creative innovation and respect for cultural origins requires intentionality and sensitivity. Nigerian designers often approach this challenge by engaging in thoughtful reinterpretation rather than direct imitation. Instead of simply recreating the kimono, they infuse it with local significance, using indigenous textiles, motifs, and colour palettes, or combining kimono-inspired forms with elements from Nigerian dress traditions.

This process also involves acknowledging the origins of the borrowed elements and respecting their cultural significance. The style was not re-named but to respect the Japanese culture, the name Kimono is still retained till date. Some designers collaborate with Japanese artisans or conduct research into the kimono's history and symbolism, ensuring that their adaptations honour the garment's heritage rather than reducing it to a mere fashion trend. This approach reflects a broader movement in global fashion towards ethical cultural exchange, which values both creativity and respect.

Global Representation and Identity

The fusion of kimono features with Nigerian fashion has significant implications for how Nigerian identity is represented on the global stage. By blending local and foreign influences, Nigerian designers showcase the country's openness to innovation and its capacity to engage in meaningful cultural dialogue. This hybrid style attracts international attention, positioning Nigeria not just as a consumer of global trends but as an active participant in shaping them.

Moreover, this fusion challenges narrow definitions of "authentic" African fashion. It highlights the fact that all cultures are dynamic and that tradition itself can be a source of innovation. As Nigerian kimono-inspired designs appear on runways in Lagos, London, and Tokyo, they tell a story of cultural confidence, a willingness to experiment, adapt, and redefine boundaries. This narrative resonates with a generation of Nigerians who see their identity as both local and global, rooted in heritage but open to the world.

The adoption of the Japanese kimono silhouette in Nigerian fashion is a prime example of cultural diffusion.

Through globalization, media, and cross-cultural interactions, the kimono's iconic loose-fitting, open-front design has been introduced to and embraced by Nigerian designers. This has led to the incorporation of kimono-style jackets, robes, and dresses into contemporary Nigerian wardrobes, often reimagined with local fabrics like Ankara, Adire, and lace.

In the context of Nigerian fashion, designers do not merely replicate the traditional Japanese kimono. The theory of hybridity refers to the blending of cultural elements to create something new. Instead, they merge the kimono's form with indigenous Nigerian textiles, colors, and motifs. For example, a kimono jacket made from vibrant Ankara prints or hand-dyed Adire fabric embodies both Japanese and Nigerian cultural identities. This fusion results in hybrid garments that are unique, innovative, and reflective of global cultural interactions.

The line between cultural appropriation and appreciation is often debated in fashion. Cultural appropriation occurs when elements of one culture are adopted by another, especially when done without understanding or respect, often leading to misrepresentation. In contrast, cultural appreciation involves respectful acknowledgment and celebration of another culture.

Nigerian designers' use of the kimono style generally leans toward cultural appreciation. By combining the kimono silhouette with local fabrics and meanings, they honor both Japanese tradition and Nigerian identity. The intent is not to claim ownership of the kimono or misrepresent its origins, but to celebrate cross-cultural creativity and innovation. However, sensitivity is required to ensure the original meaning and significance of the kimono are respected, and that such fusion does not trivialize its cultural importance.

The influence of Japanese kimono style on Nigerian fashion exemplifies how cultural traditions inspire contemporary design through processes of diffusion and hybridity. When approached thoughtfully, such exchanges can foster mutual appreciation, drive creativity, and enrich global fashion, while also raising important questions about respect, representation, and cultural boundaries. This analysis highlights the positive impact of cultural exchange in fashion, while acknowledging the importance of sensitivity and respect in cross-cultural adaptation.

Conclusion

The influence of the Japanese kimono on Nigerian fashion represents a compelling example of how cultural tradition can inspire contemporary design. While the integration of kimono elements presents the risk of diluting indigenous heritage, it simultaneously creates opportunities for enrichment, innovation, and global engagement. By carefully navigating the tension between creative adaptation and cultural respect, Nigerian designers are not only reinterpreting their own traditions but also contributing to a broader and more inclusive vision of global fashion. Ultimately, the fusion of kimono and Nigerian styles highlights the potential of fashion as a dynamic site for cultural dialogue, transformation, and celebration.

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