

The Influence of Japonism on the Parisian Fashion Journals 1860-1900

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Abstract

For the first time, the Parisian fashion journals between 1860 and 1900 have been systematically examined with regard to the influences of Japonism. The first impulses can be found beginning in 1866/67. The waves of response to Japonism run parallel to the Paris *International Exhibitions*. Even more than the obvious quotations, such as fans, umbrellas, the motifs of dragonfly, butterfly or chrysanthemum, which usually refer to Japan, a plethora of unusual geometric fabric patterns have been discovered in the fashion representations. In comparison to Japanese woodcuts and *Katagami* (paper stencils for dyeing fabrics) it was revealed that they originate in Japanese fabric design. Elements of traditional Kimono clothing have also been incorporated into the cuts of Parisian fashion. It is argued that the first form of the *tornure*, which emerged in 1867 when Japan first presented itself at the Paris *International Exhibition*, is also inspired by the *Obi* loop of the Kimono.

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State of research and subject matter of the study

In the second half of the 19th century Europe's enthusiasm for the hitherto almost unknown Japanese culture was enormous (Chesneau 1868, p. 21). Since fashion always looks for the new and original, the newly discovered Japanese aesthetic was predestined to shape the style and taste of an entire era between 1860 and 1900 and beyond. Accordingly, Japonism is well researched today through publications and exhibitions (most recently: Quette 2018). Especially, Akiko Fukai, former curator at the Kyoto Costume Institute, has investigated extensively the influences of Japonism on Western fashion (Fukai 1994, 1996, 1997, 2017). As far as Japonism in fashion is concerned, most of the studies focused almost exclusively on European paintings, graphics, photographs and, of course, the existing garments that show Japanese influences.

I would like to deepen the research which has been done so far by focusing on the phenomena of Japonism in fashion journals of the second half of the 19th century. Despite the important role that fashion journals play in spreading fashion trends, it has never been specifically studied how Japonism was reflected there from the early beginnings in the 1860s. Because Paris was the center of Japonism, I largely limited my research to the Parisian fashion journals.

First Impulses for Japonism and the role of the *International Exhibitions*

In 1786, a hundred years before Japonism reached its peak, the first volume of the German *Journal der Moden* begins an article "On the traditional costumes of the Japanese" with the remark: "No country in the world would give less occasion to be mentioned in our *Journal der Moden* than Japan." Since the country had no fashion at all, it would be the absolute antithesis

of France with its ever-changing fashion styles (Anonymous, 1786, 237 f.). Two generations later, France and the whole of Europe had fallen into “Japanomania.”

As early as 1854, when the Treaty of Kanagawa forced the opening of Japan, a first exhibition of Japanese objects was shown in the *Old Water Colour Society* in London to the amazed public (Weisberg 2016, p. 38, no. 25). From 1858, a Japanese-French trade treaty made direct exchanges with France possible, and during the 1860s, many shops opened in Paris offering goods imported from Japan. Paris became the European center of Japonism throughout the 19th century. The fashion journals reflect this.

It was the artists who opened up to the new aesthetics. They collected decorative art from Japan and incorporated it into their work. Whistler's paintings “Caprice in Purple and Gold: The Golden Screen,” 1864, or “The Princess from the Land of Porcelain”, 1863-1865 (both Washington D.C., Freer Gallery of Art) are among the ‘incunabula’ of Japonism in art (see Ono 2003). As early as 1864, they show the enthusiasm for the foreign culture to full extent. For its acceptance into fashion, the impulse of the *Paris International Exhibition* of 1867 was decisive, as Japan presented itself among other nations for the first time.



Figure 1: *The Japanese pavilion at the International Exhibition, Paris 1867, from: Le Monde Illustrée, 1867, p. 167, Münchner Stadtmuseum, Von Parish Kostümbibliothek*

Three years after the powerful start in art, the fashion journals also reacted to the new trend, but still tentatively. In the rhythm of the *Paris International Exhibitions* in 1867, 1878, 1889 and 1900, the waves of enthusiasm for Japan reached more and more of the Parisian fashion world.

The influence of Japan on fashion was not singular. In the time of historicism and colonialism, Europe was open to influences from all over the world – as, for example, from India and the Middle East (compare for instance the dress with Indian pattern design: *Le Moniteur de la Mode*, March 1869, no. 2, p. 85 or the “Salon Oriental”, *Le Moniteur de la Mode*, December 17th, 1887, p. 616 f.). But no other country that presented itself at the *International Exhibitions* was discussed as often in fashion journals as Japan and over such a long period of almost three decades. The central question of this investigation therefore is: What impact did Japan have on the fashion design presented in Paris journals?

The new ideal of Japanese culture as a source of new business ideas

In the fashion illustrations, the ladies are to be seen visiting the *International Exhibitions* – in 1878 with a Japanese pavilion in the background (compare Figure 17a) or when purchasing Japanese items in special stores (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Purchasing Japanese items, from: *Illustrirte Frauen-Zeitung*, 12, no. 19, October 1st, 1885, Münchner Stadtmuseum, Von Parish Kostümbibliothek

They are shown amidst Japanese bamboo furniture, screens, roll pictures, room dividers, sun blinds, fans, vases, and figurines. The fashion journals point out at which dealers one can buy these objects – some of them bric-a-brac for the many. In this way, the journals steered the consumer behavior of their mostly wealthy female readers. *Maison Perret et Vibert*, which specialised in Japanese furniture and handicrafts, ran a particularly large number of advertisements in several fashion journals in the late 1880s. The role of women for the Asian art market in nineteenth-century France cannot be overestimated (Emery 2020).



Left: Figure 3a, Interior with Japanese decorative elements from *La Mode Illustrée*, No. 5, May 5, 1878, Münchner Stadtmuseum, Von Parish Kostümbibliothek.

Right: Figure 3, Advertisement of *Maison Perret et Vibert*, from: *Le Moniteur de la Mode*, 45, no. 17, April 23rd, 1887, p. 148; Münchner Stadtmuseum, Von Parish Kostümbibliothek

But the journals also offered, as an advertisement says, silk brocade from robes of the Japanese Empire, four meters long for 50 francs (*Paris Charmant*, March 26th, 1887, p. 148). By buying this, the Parisian ladies were able to tailor robes in the Japanese style. It is therefore very likely that some fabrics that can be seen in the fashion plates are of original Japanese origin. In the 1880s especially, so much Japanese silk was imported into France that it was significant competition for the traditional silk production in Lyon, France. Conversely, *Maison Hecht*,

Lilienthal & Co in Lyon produced fabrics for the Japanese market from 1868, bringing Lyonnaise motifs and styles to Japan (Kobayashi 2006).

Japonism and the new ideas for women's clothing as seen in the fashion journals

It is striking that since 1867 new patterns and cuts appeared in the fashion journals which have no models or comparisons in European fashion. Can analogies be found in Japanese robes, fabric patterns and woodcuts? In 1867 abstract geometric patterns in combination with wide sleeves or with kimono-like jackets appear for the first time. The black appliques are reminiscent of Japanese ornaments which can also be found on garments like an under kimono from the Meiji Period, 19th century.



Left: Figure 4a, Dress with abstract geometric patterns, from: *Le Moniteur de la Mode* 1867, p. 422, Münchner Stadtmuseum, Von Parish Kostümbibliothek

Right: Figure 4b, Under Kimono, stencil dyeing with geometric design, silk, Meiji Period, 19th century, Kansas City, Fifi White Collection

On the occasion of the *International Exhibition* in Paris 1867, in which Japan participated for the first time, the couturier Madame Pieffort created a robe with “oriental stamps” showing figures wearing the traditional rice straw hats of Japanese farmers (*Le Moniteur de la Mode* 1867, p. 145 [“Modes. Renseignements divers, description des toilettes”] and image p. 156 f.).



Left: Figure 5a, Robe with “oriental stamps”, from: *Le Moniteur de la Mode* 1867, p. 156 f., Münchner Stadtmuseum, Von Parish Kostümbibliothek

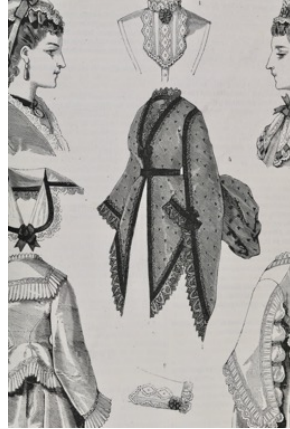
Right: Figure 5b, Detail of figure 5.

In *Le Moniteur de la Mode* of 1868, the same designer presented a

beach costume – “costume de plage” – which borrows elements from the kimono: the draping on the back is referred to as “pouff” (cushion) and it is combined with long ‘false’ sleeves. A quotation of the Kimono cushion (Japanese: obi makura) and the bag sleeve (Japanese: tamotosode) is clearly recognizable. Another example from *Le Moniteur*, Sept. 1870, shows a “Casaque de guipure noire [...] avec pouff” derrière.”



Left: Figure 6a, Beach costume, from: *Le Moniteur de la Mode* 1868, 1st no. of August, p. 253, Münchner Stadtmuseum, Von Parish Kostümbibliothek



Right: Figure 6b, “Casaque [...] avec pouff derrière”, from: *Le Moniteur de la Mode*, September 1879, p. 319, Münchner Stadtmuseum, Von Parish Kostümbibliothek

It seems that the first *tournure* was modelled after the *obi-makura* (obi cushion); it came up around 1868 – shortly after the kimono was introduced to a larger public in the Japanese House of the International Exhibition of 1867 (cf. Figure 1). This becomes even clearer when this type of “pouff” is combined with a fabric that appears to be from an original kimono, but was further processed into a European dress in 1872 (compare the robe of white silk with floral embroideries by *Miss Turner Court Dress Makers* of 1872, Kyoto, Costume Institute, see Fukai 1996, p. 33, cat. 121).

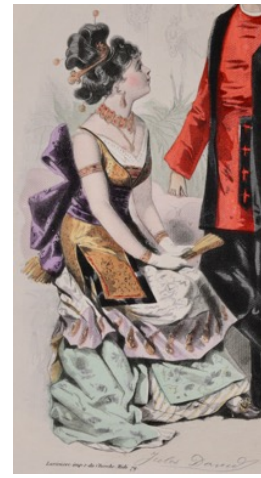
In 1870 there is also a large obi-like loop, which is admired by the lady below on the left as something entirely new. The fact that such a loop on the back was considered “Japanese” becomes clear through the center woman's obi loop in the Japanese pavilion image of 1867 (Figures 1 and 7b) and compared to a costume for a mask ball from 1878 on the right (Figure 7c). The first form of the *tournure* (1868-1876) is an upper construction on the dress – as in the kimono – whereas in the 1880s the second type of *tournure* is a substructure.



Left: Figure 7a, Obi-like loop, from: *Le Moniteur de la Mode*, April 1870, p. 121, Münchner Stadtmuseum, Von Parish Kostümbibliothek



Center: Figure 7b, Obi loop, Detail of Figure 1



Right: Figure 7c, Costume of a “Japanese” woman for a mask ball, from: *Le Moniteur de la Mode*, no. 2, January 2nd, 1878, p. 13, Münchner Stadtmuseum, Von Parish Kostümbibliothek

In his adventure novel *Around the World in Eighty Days*, which was first published in January 1873, Jules Verne's character "Jean Passepartout" observes after his arrival in the port of Yokohama that the Japanese women there are "elegantly wearing the national garment, the 'kimono', a kind of dressing gown crossed with a silk scarf, whose wide belt blossomed behind in an extravagant knot, which modern Parisians seem to have borrowed from the Japanese" (Verne 1873, chapter 22: "La large ceinture s'épanouissait derrière en un nœud extravagant, que les modernes Parisiennes semblent avoir emprunté aux Japonaises."). This observation by a contemporary confirms the thesis put forward here that the first form of the tournure, which first appeared in Paris in 1868, was created under the influence of the Japanese kimono loop.

A bodice front takes up the Japanese motive of the *eri* – the collar of the Kimono. However, it is wrongly crossed from right to left as that is only done in Japan at funerals.



Figure 8: The crossed bodice fronts of a Parisian dress references the collar of the Japanese Kimono (*eri*), from: Paris Charmant, 10, 1886 (detail), Münchner Stadtmuseum, Von Parish Kostümbibliothek

There are also Kimono like dresses, which are never referred to as "Kimono", but as "Japanese house dress" ("Robe de chambre japonais", cf. *La Mode Illustrée*, 19, no. 35, September 1st, 1878) or just "Toilette d'interieur" (cf. *Le Moniteur de la Mode*, 47, no. 6, February 9th, 1889, title illustration). In any case, the lady dressed in the kimono-like robe in her domestic interior always attracts attention (*Figure 9*).

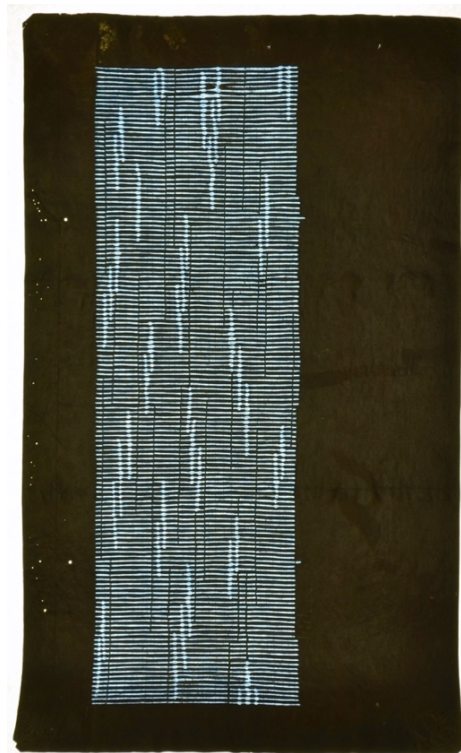


Figure 9: The admired 'Kimono' robe, from: *Illustrierte Frauen-Zeitung*, 8, no. 16, August 15th, 1881, Münchner Stadtmuseum, Von Parish Kostümbibliothek

Unusual new patterns and the probative power of the *Katagami*

What caught the eye when looking through the fashion journals were the many small geometric fabric patterns that seemed to be novel and that were not yet found in European fashion. To verify my assumption that they could have been influenced by Japanese design I compared them to Japanese woodcuts and the *Katagami*, which are paper models for kimono printing. Large collections of *Katagami* came to Europe in the second half of the 19th century, with large numbers in Dresden, Chemnitz, Berlin, and Wien where they influenced European design (Scheppe, 2014). The *Katagami* do not necessarily have to have been a direct source for the French designers, but they prove that the new patterns originate in Japanese fabric design.

It is striking that the Japanese-looking fabric patterns often appear in combination with Japanese interior components or objects which seems to underline the Japanese origin of these patterns. Examples are the interrupted lines which can be compared to a *Katagami* with a rain pattern or large undulating lines, which signify water waves in Japanese art and are often to be found on Kimonos (conf. Utagawa Kunisada, "Woman and Puppy at the Shrine", 1843, color woodcut, Cincinnati Art Museum, Museum Purchase, 1910.21) and accordingly they can also be found in the *Katagami* pattern treasure.



Left: Figure 10a, Dress ornament with interrupted lines, from: *La Mode Illustrée*, no. 34, August 25th, 1878, Münchner Stadtmuseum, Von Paris Kostümbibliothek

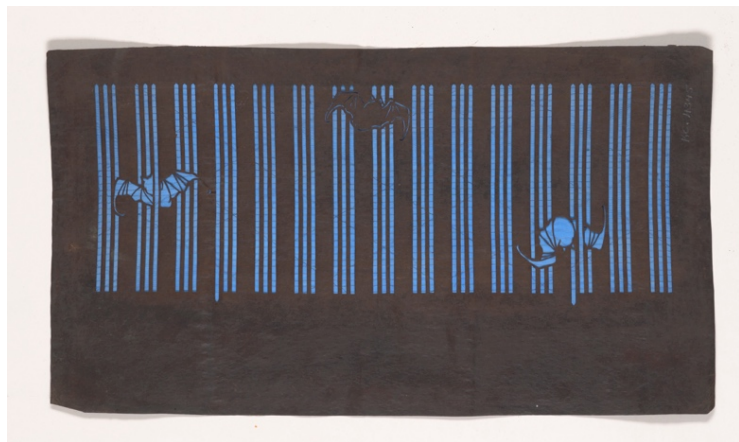
Right: Figure 10b: *Katagami* with rain pattern, Japan, 19th century, before 1889, paper, 11,2 x 35 cm (ornament), Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Kunstgewerbemuseum, Inv. 21940-52-40_2



Left: Figure 11a, Dress ornament with undulating lines, from: *Le Moniteur de la Mode*, October 1st, 1887, p. 474, Münchner Stadtmuseum, Von Parish Kostümbibliothek

Right: Figure 11b, Katagami with maple leaves and crests on flowing water, Japan, 19th century, late Edo period, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Kupferstich-Kabinett, Inv. Kc 4189; Foto: Andreas Diesend

Another French dress *à la mode* of 1886 is made of a blue and brown striped fabric. This combination is found quite frequently for women's kimonos in Japanese woodcuts of the 19th century, and a Katagami confirms the Japanese origin.



Left: Figure 12a, Dress with stripes in blue and brown, from: *Paris Charmant*, 10, 1886, Münchner Stadtmuseum, Von Parish Kostümbibliothek

Right: Figure 12b, Katagami with blue stripes and bats, Japan, 19th century, late Edo period, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Kupferstich-Kabinett, Inv. Kc 4345

There are also checked patterns different from the colorful Scottish tartans which were so popular throughout the 19th century for male and female garments. They show similarities to a Japanese *Katagami* and can be found in many Japanese woodcuts of the 19th century.



Left: Figure 13a, Dress with checked patterns, from: *Le Moniteur de la Mode*, July 23rd, 1887, p. 35 f., Münchner Stadtmuseum, Von Parish Kostümbibliothek

Right: Figure 13b, Katagami with checked pattern, Japan, 19th century, late Edo period, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Kupferstich-Kabinett, Inv. Kc 4327

I have not been able to find anywhere in literature that these geometric patterns have previously been noted as a “Japanese influence”. The pattern transfer is not immediately visible as the fabrics were used for quite ‘normal’ European dresses. Most of the time, only flowers, especially chrysanthemums, butterflies and dragonflies, are mentioned in terms of Japan's influence on fabric patterns. But for European fashion, these geometric motifs were something completely new and they were as striking then as now.

The combination of a checkerboard pattern and floral ornament seems highly unusual for a French dress. It would have been almost unthinkable in 19th century Paris without a foreign influence. And in fact, role models can also be found in Japan. Even the red-encased hem of the dress was a reference. And again, a similar combination of checkerboard and floral pattern can be found on a Katagami.



Left: Figure 14a, Dress with checkerboard pattern and floral ornament, from: *Le Moniteur de la Mode*, December 23rd, 1876, Münchner Stadtmuseum, Von Parish Kostümbibliothek

Center: Figure 14b, Kimono with checkerboard pattern and floral ornament, 17th cent., from: Kihachi / Tesuro 1974, cat. 8

Right: Figure 14c, Katagami with plant on checkerboard pattern, Japan, late Edo period, before 1889, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Kupferstich-Kabinett, Inv. Kc 427

Large spiral patterns also catch the eye on a “Toilettes et Sortie de Bal.” They find their counterpart in a *Katagami* pattern, and also in several Kimonos themselves.



Left: Figure 15a, “Toilettes et Sortie de Bal”, from: *Le Moniteur de la Mode*, 44, no. 4, January 23rd, 1886, Münchner Stadtmuseum, Von Parish Kostümbibliothek

Right: Figure 15b, *Katagami* with spiral pattern, Japan, 19th century, before 1889, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Kunstgewerbemuseum, Inv. 21940-59-101_1

There are other striking circular ornaments to be seen in the *Moniteur* of 1882, which appear to be applied to the fabric. They immediately catch the eye as ‘foreign’, too. The model for this is also to be found in Japan: they are inspired by the overall scattered roundels that are on the brocaded kimono as in the example of a dress on the Matsuura Screen in Nara shows.



Left: Figure 16a, “Toilette de ville”, from: *Le Moniteur de la Mode*, 40, no. 44, November 4th, 1882, Münchner Stadtmuseum, Von Parish Kostümbibliothek

Right: Figure 16b, “Toilette de Promenade”, from: *Le Moniteur de la Mode*, 40, no. 52, December 30th, 1882, Münchner Stadtmuseum, Von Parish Kostümbibliothek



Figure 16c: Women engaged in various Amusements, Matsuura folding screen (byōbu), ca. 1650, Nara, The Museum Yamato Bunkakan (Detail)

The ‘classic’ motifs of Japonism: flowers and leaves, fans and umbrellas

There were not only geometric, but, of course, also floral patterns, which were adopted, such as a dress with maple leaves on the occasion of the Paris *International Exhibition 1878*, where two ladies can be seen visiting an oriental tent with a Japanese house in the background. Maple leaves are a favored motif for Japanese fabrics and paper.



Left: Figure 17a, Dress with maple leaves, from: *La Mode Illustrée*, 19, n. 33, August 18th, 1878, Münchner Stadtmuseum, Von Parish Kostümbibliothek



Right: Figure 17b, Katagami with maple leaves, Japan, 19th century, late Edo Period, before 1889, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Kupferstich-Kabinett, Inv. Kc 4212

And of course, the chrysanthemum, the imperial Japanese coat of arms symbol, also appears – either as a floral ornament or in a stylized form.



Left: Figure 18a, Dress with chrysanthemum in a floral form, Le Moniteur de la Mode, 47, no. 3, January 19th 1889, Münchner Stadtmuseum, Von Parish Kostümbibliothek



Right: Figure 18b, Dress with chrysanthemum in a stylized form, from: Wiener Mode, 9, no. 10, February 15th, 1896, Münchner Stadtmuseum, Von Parish Kostümbibliothek

The novel *Madame Chrysanthème*, written in 1887 by Pierre Loti, was not only the model for an opera of the same name six years later and for Puccini's famous 1904 opera *Madame Butterfly*. It also gave its title to a fan "Madame Chrysanthème" presented in the *Moniteur* in 1888. Fans from Japan or in a Japanese style are the key element of Japonism from the very beginning. Likewise, the Japanese parasol was a central motif of Japonism. Both were considered as extremely precious accessories and were the subject of admiration. The fashion journal *Moniteur* shows an example of a fan with Japanese characters.



Left: Figure 19a, Fan "Madame Chrysanthème", from: Le Moniteur de la Mode, 46, June, 9th, 1888, no. 23, p. 271, Münchner Stadtmuseum, Von Parish Kostümbibliothek



Right: Figure 19b, Fan with Japanese Characters, from: Le Moniteur de la Mode, 49, no. 43, October, 24th, 1891 (detail), Münchner Stadtmuseum, Von Parish Kostümbibliothek

Ball and theater costumes

Fantasy costumes for the carnival or masked balls also offered full freedom of design (cf. *Journal des Demoiselles*, January 1876, no. 1; *Le Moniteur de la Mode*, no. 2, January 2nd, 1878, p. 13 [Fig. 7c.]; *Paris Charmant* 10, 1887, p. 12; *Le Moniteur de la Mode*, 46, no. 52, December 29th, 1888). It is a free play with motifs, which have little in common with real Japanese garments. In addition, Japanese and Chinese motifs are often melded together.

An important means for the popularization of Japanese fashion were the many theatre plays and famous actresses like the fashion queen Sarah Bernhardt (1844-1923) in her Japanese-inspired costumes. They were discussed extensively in Paris fashion journals (cf. Fig. 20a). You can see how theatre costumes and fashion – as presented in fashion magazines – are both inspired by Japonism and influenced each other (cf. Figs. 20b, 11a. 15a).



Left: Figure 20a, Sarah Bernhardt as “Tosca”, from: *Le Moniteur de la Mode*, December 17th, 1887, p. 609 (detail), Münchner Stadtmuseum, Von Parish Kostümbibliothek

Right: Figure 20b, Coat with appliques, from: *La Mode Illustrée*, 30, no. 38, 22nd September, 1889, Münchner Stadtmuseum, Von Parish Kostümbibliothek

Looking ahead to Art Nouveau

Finally, the covers of the fashion magazines themselves were designed in Japanese style (cf. Fig. 18b). In Art Nouveau, which spread throughout Europe in the 1890s, Japanese influences in graphic design were particularly pronounced. Through the Japanese impulse, Art Nouveau achieved its own distinctive style. This epoch heralds the next stage of Japonism, which is equally reflected in fashion journals between 1900 and 1930.

Summary

The study has shown that fashion journals are an excellent source of the history of Japonism. Since they appeared at short intervals, the origins and development of phenomena of reception can be traced here more meticulously than in any other medium. They reflect Japonism continuously during decades and in all its forms.

By comparing the illustrations with the Japanese clothing on woodcut prints, photos and fabric patterns, it can be shown how diverse and comprehensive the fashion journals had taken up the impulses from Japan, how they developed them creatively and spread them internationally. Fashion journals were ‘trendsetters’ for a large public like no other medium. The fashion journals played a major role in the rapid success and international spread of Japonism. Looking closer at

the fashion journals, the strategies of reception and visual mediation are revealed and, of course, how much of European Japonism was an eclectic construct. The new influences were incorporated into European culture and fashion, and – as always with such a response – became something new. The constant search of fashion for novelty and originality can be followed here from hesitant beginnings to exalted creations.

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