

Spring 5-3-2019

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Recommended Citation

Klein, Rebecca L., "Bunad and Kimono, Recovering Tradition or Crisis of Identity?" (2019). *Graduate Academic Symposium*. 65.
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Bunad and Kimono, Recovering Tradition or Crisis of Identity?

Becky Klein

Mentor: Prof. Kari-Anne Innes, Ph.D.

The traditional costume of those nations which have them is an important element of its citizens' cultural identity. Some nations have national costumes with specific messages, gendered or otherwise, while others do not. One example of a strong national costume with a long history is the Norwegian *bunad*, or the traditional clothing worn by Norwegian men and women over the centuries. The *bunad* has developed specific particular characteristics within smaller regions throughout the country. A Norwegian person's cultural heritage can be deduced from observing their *bunad* and its particular design and style elements. Japan also has a strong historical national costume, the *kimono*. This costume was similarly worn by both men and women, but in the last century has generally only been worn by women. The *kimono* has also traditionally played a specific role in communicating information about the wearer. Both costumes have recently experienced changes in significance within their societies impacting their use and wear. I will evaluate the historical development and role of national costumes, both Norway's *bunad* as well as Japan's *kimono*. Why did a national clothing identity develop in both nations, and what are their meanings? What are the cultural elements contributing to their re-development?

While national costumes are sometimes regarded as irrelevant and old-fashioned, perhaps even seen as a symbol of anti-feminism, they communicate valuable information about their wearers and need not be considered a double bind or crisis of identity but rather as recovering tradition. National costumes like Norway's *bunad* and Japan's *kimono* are works of art, often highly desired and valued by both those who procure them and those who observe them, whether

male or female. Additionally, they are usually well known beyond the borders of their homelands as recognizable symbols of cultural identity and even claimed by those of similar ethnic background but living in other countries. National costumes like the *bunad* and *kimono* are still used regularly in positive cultural celebrations and hold an important role in reclaiming cultural identity in a world where diversity and pluralism pervade.