

This Monday, I went to a kimono shop in Nagoya with the women from my tea ceremony class because we are starting kimono lessons this week. I actually bought my first winter kimono, which is dark blue with a light blue *sakura* pattern, and a gorgeous coordinating pink obi. My first kimono lesson is tonight so I still don't know what to expect, but today I am going to write about my first impressions of Japanese kimono.

My first experience wearing a kimono was the first time I visited Japan, when our friends were kind enough to dress me and my mother in their kimono. I remember being surprised at how long it took to get properly tied into the kimono, and then how difficult it was to walk in shoes that were too small for my fairly large feet. It was also a very humid summer day, and I couldn't believe that Japanese women really wore such a complicated outfit even in such hot weather. I loved the colors and the patterns on the kimono, but I was fairly uncomfortable and I didn't have any desire to wear kimono again.

Over the past few years, something must have changed, because now I am very interested in Japanese kimono. There are so many different patterns and styles that are specific to certain occasions and the material that is used for both the kimono and the obi is so beautiful. It is somewhat surprising to me that there are so many different styles and colors while the shape of a kimono is almost always the same.

I think I was too young during my first visit to Japan to really appreciate the Japanese traditions that I learned about. I'm happy that now I have a chance to come back and learn about traditional Japanese arts that I would never have studied at home. The rich history of Japan and the traditions that date from centuries ago are particularly interesting to me because my own American heritage is much different. I can trace my family back only a few generations in America, and most of our customs were brought over from Italy and Ireland where my ancestors lived. The principal characteristic of the United States is that it is a combination of people and cultures that came from different places. Only now is my country beginning to have its own proper traditions, and they date back only a few decades. For this reason, I particularly appreciate Japanese traditions like kimono because they represent a long standing tradition, something that is not very common in America.

I can't pinpoint how I changed between the first time I wore a kimono and today, but I am much more interested in finding out about Japanese traditions like kimono and tea ceremony that are such an important part of Japanese culture. I have yet to actually *wear* my new kimono, but if all goes as planned, I really think I am going to enjoy learning about this Japanese custom that has no American equivalent.

