

‘a Chinese beauty as spectator at the horse races at Longchamps, near Paris.’ n.d.

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It was the error in the caption that first caught my eye, as the woman wears formal Japanese dress. When I received the press photograph I had bought online, it had two paper captions pasted on the back, both crediting ‘Copyright Keystone View Co.’; the first typed in English, the second in German with the addition ‘Text ohne Gewähr, A.’ (Text without Awareness, A.)

The Keystone View Company, trading in Pennsylvania from 1892, specialized in stereographic photographs; but it also operated as Keystone Press supplying press photographs after the Great War, with offices in London and by 1927, Paris and Berlin. Keystone Press was the result of a merger with Press Illustrating Service, a New York photo agency started in 1914 by Bert Garai, a Hungarian refugee who innovated a new photojournalist style of informal celebrity photos and news stories.

The photo is likely to have been taken in the mid-to-late 1920s and can be related to the racetrack fashions documented by Séeberger Frères at Longchamp and Deauville between 1909-39, who sold fashion trends to newspapers in collusion with Parisian couturiers. The title of the photo, which refers to the woman ‘as a spectator’ only confirms it was traded according to the prevailing idiom for this type of news image; but her placement set against the racetrack fencing and not nearer the enclosure is notably different.

She wears her kimono without a train, its length tucked up into the obi belt which is worn unnaturally high, as if binding the chest to achieve the fashionable Western *garçonne* silhouette, rather than sitting under the chest as formally correct for a young Japanese woman. Both are worn under a *haori*, a kimono-style coat with sleeves revealing a bangle, wristwatch and gemstone ring. The outfit is in keeping with the modifications to Japanese dress that took place after the end of the Meiji period when Western dress styles, referred to as *yōfuku*, were actively promoted. To counter the expense of a new wardrobe, the evocation of a Western image was first promoted in Japanese department stores through

the adoption of accessories, and modifying how traditional dress was worn in order to look fashionable.

The recent exhibition, *Kimono Refashioned* (2019) at the Asian Art Institute, San Francisco, repositioned the influence of the kimono on international fashion. It displayed an outfit by Parisian couturier Paul Poiret from the late 1920s, owned by the Kyoto Costume Institute, that is remarkably similar in form to the outfit the young woman wears; except one is termed *haute couture*, the other traditional dress.

As she stands there -a thumb held awkwardly by a forefinger, one foot set in front of the other- she distinguishes herself from a mannequin at work. Framed by a man and a woman who stand on chairs facing the race, she looks in the other direction into the middle distance, a slight sense of resignation captured in her face at having her photo taken. Perhaps, in that moment, she realised she was being photographed not because she looked her most fashionably Western, but because the photographer mistook her for looking her most Other/Eastern/Chinese/Japanese. While the text on the back of the photograph remains without awareness, the young woman depicted on the front is now proved not beyond fashion, but anticipating it.

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