

## Some men swapping pants for dresses

By MAYA KANEKO  
Kyodo News

Style-conscious Japanese males have brought the skirt, a garment synonymous with femininity, to the forefront of cutting-edge men's fashion.

Walking down a street in Tokyo's hip Harajuku district, it is possible to spot men wearing various types of skirts or skirtlike garments, including wraps, pant skirts and long skirts, which look like aprons, as well as pantaloons.

Some wear a skirt on top of jeans, while others coordinate knee-high socks with the garment. They blend easily into the crowds where fashion-conscious people test out their newest styles.

"It's not particularly challenging for me to wear skirts. It is like wearing a long coat, and I like the style in winter, because it is warmer," said a 38-year-old company worker from Nerima Ward who was wearing a long black wrap skirt over his trousers in Harajuku.



**Accessorizing:** Naohiro Yamamoto (left), an employee of apparel venture Zooee Corp., which opened Japan's first online shop that exclusively sells men's skirts, and a 38-year-old man wearing a long black wrap skirt over his trousers chat in Tokyo's Harajuku district March 11. KYODO PHOTO

The man, who declined to be identified, said he first bought a skirt by Comme des Garcons, a Japanese brand, more than 10 years ago and noted that men's skirts were introduced by fashion designers long before the recent boom among youngsters started around last summer.

Yuki Togashi, a 19-year-old college student from Chiba Prefecture, said he started wrapping clothes imported from other parts of Asia, including Afghanistan, around his waist over his trousers to "stick out."

"I was looking for a style that my friends wouldn't copy," he said.

Daisuke Kumamoto, an 18-year-old high school student dressed in a pair of pantaloons, confessed that nobody wanted to sit next to him and he drew cold stares from other passengers when he was on a train wearing a skirt in Kanagawa Prefecture.

But he said he likes the shape of the skirt and pantaloons and that their loose form make them comfortable. "It's no fun if you look the same as others," Kumamoto said.

Capitalizing on the growing interest in skirts among Japanese men, Naohiro Yamamoto of Zooee Corp., a venture apparel company based in Tokyo, opened in January Japan's first online shop that sells men's skirts exclusively.

To the surprise of Yamamoto and Zooee President Koichiro Yoshida, the company received a rush of orders for wrap skirts priced between ¥5,000 and ¥13,000, sending the business into the black in just one month.

Yamamoto, himself a skirt wearer, said the reasonably priced skirts sold at Zooee's online shop Cross Gender were widely accepted by men mainly in their early 20s not only in Tokyo but also in regional cities, including Sendai, Fukuoka and Osaka.

Skirts of top brands such as Comme des Garcons and Vivienne Westwood usually carry a price tag of at least ¥50,000 and not many skirt items for men are sold in shops outside Tokyo, he said.

"We started this business as a kind of joke to attract customers, but now it has become profitable. I guess items that cannot be sold easily in the face-to-face setting fare well in e-commerce," Yoshida said.

Yamamoto believes that in Japan, where men used to wear kimono in everyday life, the difference between men and women has been blurred and men nowadays are relatively free from dress standards based on gender stereotypes.

"Men wear a skirt just because they think they look cool," Yamamoto said. "Fashion-conscious males have tried on everything they can in men's style and the skirt is appealing as something new." The online shop aims to promote "men's skirts that are also supported by women" and hopes the current popularity does not end up a mere fad.

Skirt-wearing men naturally include transvestites or those who want to look like women, and Hisaaki Oshima, a 51-year-old longtime fan of kilts and skirts for men, believes they should not be excluded from efforts to increase the number of male skirt wearers and raise awareness of the fashion style in Japan.

"I hope it becomes more conventional for men to wear skirts. If more men wear skirts, public understanding will grow, and more people will realize it is foolish to make value judgments about the fashion styles of others," he said.

Prejudice against long-haired men and those with pierced ears disappeared after more men adopted those styles and people became used to them, he added.

Oshima, a father of two in Tokyo who began taking to the streets in a kilt or skirt about three years ago, said he personally does not want to look like a woman and adopts the skirt style because he thinks it is cool for men.

"Since childhood, I have been wondering why men only have one option compared with women, who have both choices of wearing a skirt and a pair of trousers," Oshima said. "I believe skirts on men have been regarded as a taboo in a male-dominated society, as skirt wearers are treated the same way as women are treated and discriminated against.

"Fashion is a way of expressing your individuality. So I want people to respect it," he said. So far, passersby are generally indifferent to him dressed in a skirt, he added.

Both Yamamoto and Oshima are promoting men's skirts in their blogs and many readers ask questions about how to treat leg hair when they wear a skirt.

Young men these days are also more accustomed to the "cosplay" culture of costume role play, in which males often wear costumes of female characters in animation, comics and video games, Hineno said. "Those boys are not gay. They just love clothes and are exploring the untapped territory of girls as a result of moving to the forefront of fashion trends."

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