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FASHION | JULIE HATFIELD

Made in Japan

Bostonians are taking Orient expressions seriously

Boston men and women were more skeptical than most Americans last year when Japanese-inspired clothing styles, a slowly growing influence in our fashion conscience for several years, suddenly became a major force in design. Black sackcloth with holes torn in random places was not to be taken seriously in a region where sensible tweed blazers and ruffled white collars reign supreme.

But Bostonians' skepticism has ended, now that they realize the torn sacks were only the exaggerated introduction to an entirely new way of thinking about clothes — a way that, at second glance, looks more and more appealing (so much so, in fact, that reports out of Milan this week say the spring fashions have a decidedly Japanese flavor).

Black on black on black? The most practical and sophisticated city color you can wear. One-size-fits-all dressing? Simple for both storekeepers and custom-

ers. Layered clothing? We've always done that in the Northeast out of necessity. Oversized clothing? It looks as great on skinny people as on fat ones and mercifully conceals all the lumps and bumps of the latter with a good deal of grace. Flat shoes in the city? When they're simple and black and understated, a far nicer look than running shoes and much more interesting than Bass moccasins.

Those are only a few of the basic premises of dressing Japanese in Boston, 1983 style.

The stores are filled with Japanese and Japanese-inspired clothes, all severe black and gray, and made of nubby fabrics that look hand-woven. Many are hand-dyed with some of the irregularities of color left in, just as irregularities in texture are. Indeed, the feel and the look of the fabric is as important as the shape of the garment itself. Granted, the inveterate Boston discount shopper looking at this Japanese fabric treatment might think she had an "irregular" on her hands unless she has an artistic eye that can tell it was all done on purpose.

Like a Japanese garden, the subtleties of the look begin to emerge long after the first glance. It is only then you realize that this is no brief fad that should be avoided until it spends itself.

Like everything the Japanese undertake, their fashions have been carefully thought out and executed to be interesting, attractive, comfortable, different, and for the man and woman who consider themselves contemporary, necessary parts of their wardrobes.

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This year's imports from Japan include (far left) Yohji Yamamoto's raw-edged wool coat treated with polyurethane, worn over a wool draped apron dress and leggings, and (left) his layered raincoats in brightly colored transparent nylon for a rainbow effect.

