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Maps

Japan

Land mass comparison between Japan and the United States.
The Japanese Kimono

a historical essay
by Anne Rose Kitagawa

Introduction

The following essay outlines the history of the Japanese kimono—that most elegant and sophisticated of garments—over the past three thousand years. The Art Institute of Chicago houses a small but selective collection of Japanese textiles, including some of the finest kimono outside of Japan.¹ Many are objects of extraordinary beauty, craftsmanship, and cultural significance. Like most pieces in an art museum, these kimono reflect the affluence and tastes of the wealthiest members of society, since only the most “important” (hence expensive) objects are usually deemed precious enough to warrant preservation.

The clothing that a society chooses to wear tells a great deal about that society as a whole. While studying the long and varied history of the kimono we will learn a lot about Japan, its cultural history, and many related values and beliefs.

Japan (see Map on page 4) is a mountainous chain of islands located off the eastern coast of Korea, southwest of the eastern edge of the Commonwealth of Independent States (the former U.S.S.R.). Characterized by low, rolling hills and abundant forests, the landscape of Japan is varied and beautiful. Arable land is relatively scarce, and many areas are difficult to cultivate. The Japanese are most likely descendants of a mixture of continental peoples from the Asian mainland and an older indigenous population, who are now represented only in the very far north by the Ainu (a caucasoid aboriginal people once culturally and ethnically distinct from the Japanese but who have all but disappeared as a discrete group²). Living in an area prone to earthquakes, tidal waves, and heavy seasonal rains, the Japanese developed a resilient and fascinating culture, alternately interacting with and insulating themselves from outside influences. Often chafing at its reputation as a cultural emulator of China, Japan has in fact learned a great deal from her sophisticated and influential continental neighbor. However, the Japanese have so consistently put their own “spin” on their appropriations, that their culture must be recognized as unique and distinct.

The history of the kimono exemplifies the Japanese adoption of technological skills from China, including cultivation of silkworms, spinning, and weaving of silk, which were perfected over generations.

Kimono production also exemplifies the specialization of labor which has made Japan such an avid competitor in the late twentieth-century global economy, since similar principles of the division of labor and expertise among many individuals also underlie modern Japanese products such as microchips, automobiles, and stereos.
Japanese Kimono Etiquette

Kimono, literally “the thing worn,” is a very generalized modern Japanese word which encompasses a wide variety of traditional Japanese garments more properly referred to by their specific names (e.g. suribaku, kosode, furisode, etc.).

The Japanese have a highly developed and elaborate sense of clothing etiquette. Traditionally, a person’s dress was a statement to her or his peers, visually signifying not only the wearer’s age, social and marital status, profession, and activity, but also the season (conveyed through the decorative designs as well as weight of the fabric) and even the wearer’s mood. Everything about a robe—the length of its sleeves, its weave, the type of cloth, its color and decoration—contributes to this formal syntax of attire. In addition, the patterns and motifs meticulously woven into and embroidered onto such a garment often contain subtle allusions to seasonal poetry or classical legends.

Because we live in a period when relatively sturdy and well-tailored clothing is mass-produced and readily available to a wide consumer clientele, it is difficult for us to understand the preciously individual nature of these sumptuous kimono. Each garment had to be custom tailored, made by hand, and usually designed in conjunction with the wearer as a direct reflection of her/his sensibilities. Yet even today we infer a great deal about people by what they choose to wear.3

Strict rules govern how and when a person (usually a woman) can wear a particular kimono. As mentioned above, there are colors and patterns considered appropriate to particular occasions or phases of a person’s life. For example, a married woman tends to wear kimono with smaller patterned ornamentation and shorter sleeves than an unmarried woman, whose brightly colored, boldly patterned, long-sleeved furisode connotes her freedom, attractiveness, and availability.

From early times in Japan, delicately ornamented textiles were used widely, not only to cover the body, but also as an economic and personal commodity. Bolts of silk and finished kimono were traded in exchange for both debts and gifts and were even used in payment of taxes.
Jomon (10,500 - 200 B.C.E.), Yayoi (200 B.C.E. - 250 C.E.), and Kofun periods (250 - 552 C.E.)

The pre-Bronze Age culture of Japan developed rapidly, probably due to strong cultural influences from the Asian mainland. We know very little of the clothing worn during the Jomon period (10,500 - 200 B.C.E. of the Neolithic phase), named for the characteristic jomon or cord-marked pottery, save what can be inferred from scraps of plaited bark fibers, polished bone needles, and one recent and virtually unprecedented archaeological find. While excavating an ancient shell mound (a place where prehistoric Japanese dumped their refuse) which dates roughly to the fourth millennium B.C.E., archaeologists found a fragment of coarse Jomon period cloth made from carefully twined and knitted nettle fibers. Similar fabrics have been produced ever since that time in some rural parts of Japan, but only with the 1986 excavation was the antiquity of the process fully appreciated.

During the Yayoi period (200 B.C.E. - 250 C.E.) the Japanese absorbed many influences from the Asian mainland. Rice cultivation, bronze casting, iron technology, glassmaking, and advanced methods of woodworking all point to strong continental influence. It is commonly believed that due to this increased contact with China and Korea, the Japanese wore simple, square cut robes, similar to those seen on early Chinese tomb figurines (Fig. 1).

During the ensuing Kofun or Old Tumulus period (250 - 552 B.C.E.), people seem to have worn distinctive, simply-cut tunics decorated with bold geometric patterns. These garments are depicted on clay figures (Haniwa) which were placed around a grave mound or tumulus (Fig. 2). On the other hand, the painted figures depicted on the walls of Takamatsuzuka (a recently excavated Kofun period tomb in Asuka, Japan) wear essentially Korean garments (Fig. 3).

The early Japanese must certainly have been aware of silk from ancient China. Silk is the fine, soft, shiny filament produced by silk worms while they form their cocoons. The Chinese produced silk from the Shang dynasty (1700 - 1050 B.C.E.), if not earlier, and the West introduced this precious commodity during the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E. - C.E. 220). The Chinese carefully guarded the source of silk production. In order to make silk, the Chinese cultivated silk-worms, which they fed a steady diet of mulberry leaves, and then boiled and painstakingly unravelled the cocoons to produce this finest of natural fibers. The Japanese knew of silk through their trade with China and their interaction with Chinese settlers who brought the secrets of silk-making with them to Japan.
Asuka (538-645) and Nara (645-794) periods

Japanese written records begin in the Nara period (645-794), although the Chinese had mentioned Japan centuries earlier. A collection of indigenous ruling families organized over time into an aristocracy on the model of Tang dynasty (618-907) China. Buddhism made its way from the Asian mainland to Japan during the sixth century. This ancient religion originated in the teachings of the Nepalese prince Shakyamuni Gautama (sixth century B.C.E.) who stressed the importance of acknowledging the non-reality of the physical world and the potential for enlightenment through disciplined self-cultivation. Although never committed to writing during his lifetime, Shakyamuni’s philosophical teachings spread with hundreds of missionaries and pilgrims who travelled along the Silk Road which extended across Central Asia from China. In time, these pilgrims found their way to Korea and Japan. Initially viewed with trepidation by the Japanese aristocracy, Buddhism was eventually adopted as a state religion, and successfully blended over the ensuing centuries with Shinto and Japanese religious and folk beliefs—which stressed purity, sacred space, and the changing of seasons.

During the Asuka (538-645) and Nara periods (both named for their respective capitals) Chinese influence on Japan was quite strong, as is exemplified by the belongings of the Japanese emperor Shomu (701-756) which were deposited after his death into the Shoso-in, a treasure house at the important Buddhist temple Todai-ji in Nara. Shomu’s empress Komyo placed all of his ritual objects and daily utensils into this storehouse, where they have remained amazingly intact to the present. Most of these beautiful artifacts are either of Chinese origin, or are based on Chinese styles. The Tang dynasty was truly the height of China’s political power and cultural prestige, and the newly inaugurated Japanese state quickly fell under the sway of Tang fashions in painting, sculpture, ceramics, metalwork, and, of course, textiles. The Shoso-in houses numerous examples of Chinese silk, many worked into beautifully finished garments in the Tang style (Figs. 4, 5, and 6).

It was also during the Asuka and Nara periods that fabric, especially silk, began to be used as currency. Taxes took many forms, including those paid in rice, other produce, labor, and silk, which no doubt contributed to the establishment of a weaving industry that later developed into one of the most sophisticated ever known.
Heian period (794-1185)

The Heian period (794 - 1185), named for the capital city of Heian-kyo (modern Kyoto), is often regarded as the height of Japanese refinement. Japan's strong cultural ties with China were largely severed during this period, when the Japanese perceived that the Tang dynasty had fallen on hard times and decided that the Chinese were no longer worthy of emulation. This period saw a striking "Japanization" of taste. The Heian court, supported entirely through the labors of a peasantry which lived in incredibly squalid conditions, had the free time and affluence to develop almost pervasively aestheticized sensibilities. Quite apart from the strict ranking of courtly colors which had been established during the Asuka period (based on a Chinese system but enlarged and augmented in Japan), the aristocrats of the Heian court were acutely sensitive to nuances of color, tone, scent, and sound. They were also deeply moved by poetry based on the inevitable "transience of things" (mono no aware) and the Buddhist-inspired sense of evanescence which they perceived to permeate every aspect of their existence.

Besides being physically attractive, people of this rarified society were expected to know a vast store of classical Japanese poetry by heart; to be able to spontaneously recite (or write in a flawless calligraphic hand) elegant original verses in response to these classical prototypes; to play at least one musical instrument with distinction; to recognize a number of exotic and expensive aromatic scents from the merest whiff of incense; to paint cleverly and to provide witty conversation for their contemporaries.

A court attendant's choice of clothing was seen as a visible extension of her or his multifaceted talents, and had to reflect the subtlety indicative of good breeding. Heian men wore robes not unlike those of the Nara period, except that extra fabric was used and even stiffened in order to give the courtier's silhouette a broader and hence more stately appearance (Fig. 7). Heian women wore heavy, elaborate multi-layered silk garments now referred to as junihitoe (which means literally "twelve unlined robes," although during the Heian period they often wore up to forty! Fig. 8). Since only the sleeve edges of most of the junihitoe layers were visible, it would seem to most of us in the twentieth century to have been more trouble and expense than it was worth to carefully choose and arrange so many brightly colored garments. Not so during the Heian period, when a glimpse of the tastefully arranged sleeves of a court lady seen at the base of her
screen of state (which would always hide her from the prying gaze of all men outside of her immediate family) was enough to send a potential lover reeling and often provided the impetus for a characteristically bittersweet, poetic love affair.

Many Heian poems use clothing imagery. For example, "dew-drenched sleeves" could mean that a person had wept for so long that her/his entire sleeve was soaked with tears. Since courtiers also slept under many layers of clothing, Heian love poetry is rife with wistful verses recalling the lingering fragrance of a lover’s perfume on one’s bedding the morning after an encounter. Countless pages of Heian literature are devoted to the detailed enumeration of the specific shades and patterns on the garments worn by the protagonists. Such description seems excessive in translation, but was designed to tell the fashion-savvy contemporary audience about those characters’ innate sensibilities and their inner states.

Such obsession with cultivated self-expression and flaunting of material wealth did not bode well for the Heian aristocrats. Unaware of their waning political influence, they became increasingly introverted, devoting their attentions to their privileged, cloistered, artistic pursuits. Over time, the Heian court came to rely increasingly upon provincial armed warrior families to collect the taxes upon which their livelihood depended. This reliance upon military strongmen spelled the eventual demise of the Heian court and also signaled the decline of Japanese imperial power.

**Kamakura period (1185 - 1333)**

The political supremacy of the overly aestheticized Heian court was soon overshadowed by samurai (warriors) who exerted military control first in the provinces, and then established a shogunate (military dictatorship) in the town of Kamakura. During the Kamakura period (1185 - 1333), the first shogun, Minamoto Yoritomo (1147 - 1199), did not depose the emperor, but rather ruled around him, maintaining the imperial family as a powerless figurehead. The excesses of the Heian aristocracy were severely curtailed, and a new frugality was favored by the shogunate.

Partly as a result of this power struggle, the junihitoe fell out of fashion. In its place the kosode ("small sleeves," referring to the opening for the hand and not to the sleeve length), previously worn underneath the multiple layers of Heian women’s clothing, became outerwear (Fig. 9). Kosode afforded women a new-found freedom of move-
ment and were soon produced in many specially brocaded, dyed, and
embroidered fabrics. Men also wore *kosode*, though not quite so
prominently, since theirs were partly hidden underneath a matching
top and full pleated trousers (Fig. 10).

The kimono as we now know it is the descendant of these
Kamakura period *kosode*, and the garment has changed
remarkably little in shape over time. Since the Kamakura
period, major trends in kimono fashion tend to be changes
in the arrangement of patterns on this *kosode* garment,
developments in dyeing or embroidering techniques, changes
in characteristic color combinations, or changes in sash width
or pattern. The cut of the robe, always made economically from
square-cut full widths of cloth sewn flat and adjusted lengthwise by a
sash or *obi*, remained consistent.

Although the Kamakura shoguns were eventually ousted, similar
forms of military rule were established with varying degrees of success
during the next five hundred years. The shogunate system was abol-
ished soon after Japan was forcibly opened to the outside world in the
nineteenth century.

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**Muromachi (1333 - 1573) and
Momoyama (1573 - 1615) periods**

The Muromachi period (1333 - 1573) was the second shogunal
dynasty, established by the warrior Ashikaga Takauji (1305 - 1358) in
the old capital city of Kyoto (Heiankyo of the Heian period). The
Ashikaga shoguns were very active in trade with China and also
patronized many Chinese Chan (Japanese: Zen) Buddhist monks who
sought refuge from the “barbarian” Yuan dynasty (1280 - 1368) by
establishing Zen temples in Japan. The shoguns also collected Chinese
paintings, ceramics, and bronzes, and patronized the newly established
Noh theater.

Noh was derived from a variety of ancient folk and ritual dances as
interpreted by Zeami (c. 1364 - c. 1443), a brilliant young actor and
playwright favored by the third Muromachi shogun Ashikaga
Yoshimitsu (1358 - 1408). Long, slow-paced, and performed by strictly
trained masked actors on a bare stage decorated only with a huge
painted pine in the background, Noh seems quite static to the Western
viewer unprepared for the subtle intensity of the medium. Still retain-
ing much of its ritual character, Noh incorporates stylized dance, music, and pantomime in a cadenced narrative format. Since Noh is performed on a bare stage with a minimum of props, the brilliance of the actors' costumes is essential to the drama. Most Noh plays are based on tales of classical origin and emphasize the transience of worldly attachments, once again showing strong Buddhist undertones. Because the focus of Noh is concentrated in the subtle movements of the actor, costumes are of the utmost importance. In this all-male theater, garments and elaborately carved wooden masks were used to establish a character's gender, personality, profession, and social status, as well as to make clear her or his existential identity (e.g. human, god, or demon). Noh robes serve as moving scenery in a relatively static theatrical medium. Most display symbolism with heightened poetic meaning, for example the stylized scales on the robe seen in Fig. 11 and Slide 11 which suggest the evil serpentine nature of the possessing spirit of the court lady Rokujo no kimi. Kimono are also sometimes used to symbolize people. In the same print, the limp and lifeless form of the woman possessed by Rokujo's vengeful spirit is symbolized by the empty kimono lying on the floor at the actor's feet. In another famous play, Izutsu, the wife of a deceased courtier dons his clothing and then sees her late husband's reflection in her own by the well that was the setting for their first encounter. Such clothing imagery is rampant in Noh, continuing in the time-honored poetic tradition of the Heian period.

The sumptuous robes used in Noh were originally no different from the elegant garments worn by the theater's wealthy warrior patrons. Such exquisite (outer) robes were often proffered by enthusiastic audience members to their favorite actors, in appreciation of a particularly riveting performance. Such gifts would be absorbed into the troupe's theatrical wardrobe, a dramatic continuation of the idea of textiles as currency but with added layers of poetic symbolism.

The Muromachi shoguns eventually lost their political power and remained only as figureheads during a period of intensely divisive civil wars, until the last Ashikaga shogun was officially deposed by Oda Nobunaga (1534 - 1582), the first of Japan's so-called Three Great Unifiers. The other two were Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537 - 1598) and Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543 - 1616). The Momoyama period (1573 - 1615), named for Nobunaga's estate on Peach Hill in Kyoto, during which these three great warriors extended their control across Japan was one of varied and often contradictory influences. Characterized
on the one hand by bombastic pattern and overt bravado, this period also saw the rise of extremely astringent and subdued “Tea Taste” and consciously imperfect, exorbitantly expensive, “rustic” pottery. Christianity was also introduced and gained a certain momentum on the Japanese archipelago. Whether this was due to true Christian faith (as opposed to the Japanese fascination with the firearms that came with the Portuguese and Spanish missionaries), is not entirely clear.\textsuperscript{13}

One of the great strengths of the Art Institute’s kimono collection is a group of elegant Noh costumes. The oldest is a sixteenth-century Nuihaku (Fig. 12 and Slide 1). It is one of the two oldest Noh robes known to be in existence, and the only one outside of Japan. The sleeves of this exquisite Nuihaku were originally shorter. At a later date, when fashion called for longer sleeves, sections of another (sixteenth century) robe were added. Aside from a few inches of fabric added at the hemline, the garment is intact and original, though the originally brilliant colors have faded. The designs and colors on the left and right sides of the garment vary slightly. One side has snow-laden willows in the lozenge-shaped frames; the other, miniature landscapes inside framed medallions.

Imagery from classical Japanese literature abounds in these decorative designs. For example, the lovely iris plants, combined with multiple footbridges (just visible on the right of Fig. 13), allude to a scene in a famous anthology, in which a celebrated poet (renowned in part for his many love affairs) pauses at the site of eight bridges in a rural setting in order to compose a nostalgic verse bemoaning the lover he left behind in the capital.

\begin{quote}
I have a beloved wife,
Familiar as the skirt
Of a well-worn robe,
And so this distant journeying
Fills my heart with grief\textsuperscript{12}
\end{quote}

This poem is an acrostic because the first syllable of each line (in the Japanese) “spells” kakitsubata, or iris\textsuperscript{13}. The visual image on the nuihaku, ostensibly a simple landscape, contains multiple layers of poetic allusion to classical themes. An amazing number of such classicizing details reward close observation of the Art Institute’s Nuihaku, yet the vast array of individual motifs is lovingly balanced within an elegant overall pattern.
Edo period (1615 - 1868)

The Edo, or Tokugawa period (1615 - 1868), so called because the Tokugawa shoguns chose the northern city of Edo (modern Tokyo) as their capital, saw many changes in Japanese culture. All of the kimono considered thus far have been garments made under the auspices of the uppermost echelon of Japanese society, either for the courtly aristocracy or the military retainers of the shogun's entourage, but for the first time during the Edo period we begin to see signs of a vibrant non-aristocratic, though undeniably wealthy, urban culture.

Originally, the Tokugawa shoguns stratified Japanese society into four distinct groups: the samurai (warrior elite) at the highest level, followed by farmers, artisans, and merchants. Merchants were at the bottom of this social ranking because they did not produce anything, but rather capitalized upon the toil of others. Yet over the course of the Edo period this theoretical ordering of society no longer corresponded to economic reality because the merchant class came to control a considerable proportion of the nation’s wealth. Denied access to political power, these urban merchants spent their money lavishly on both culture and frivolity. This extravagant young culture became a separate world in itself, and was dubbed ukiyo, the “Floating World,” aptly characterizing this ever changing arena of fashion and entertainment.

Fashion during the Edo period was dominated by prostitutes from the licensed brothel district, Yoshiwara, on the one hand and Kabuki actors on the other. Although they were indentured into brothels as children with little hope of ever living as ordinary women, the highest ranking courtesans of the Yoshiwara could refuse unwelcome patrons and were unquestionably the most admired and envied women of the age (Fig. 14 and Slide 12). The most lavish and flamboyant of the all-male Japanese theatrical forms (in striking contrast to the relative status of Noh) is Kabuki. Kabuki combines sheer spectacle, expressive artistry, opulent costume, violent dramatic action, and sometimes vulgar comedy into an intricately interwoven narrative pattern of acting, singing, and dancing. The kimono worn by Kabuki actors tend toward the bombastic, with bright, bold patterns and intense, sometimes shocking color combinations (Fig. 15).

Textile technology reached a zenith of variety and creativity as these stylish women and men vied with one another to acquire and wear the most elegant, up-to-date, and outrageous fashions. Japanese woodblock prints from this period (of which the Art Institute of Chicago has a world-famous collection) are very useful to students of Japanese textiles, because they meticulously record even the smallest details of these rapidly changing fashions. The Tokugawa government became
so alarmed at the conspicuous consumption by members of this "floating world" that strict laws were enacted, in the hope of curtail-
ing what was perceived as an embarrassing extravagance. During the period, merchants were repeatedly told that they could not wear silk, should not display ostentatiously decorated robes, and should not use gold or silver in their garments. These sumptuary laws were ignored. Wily merchants merely worked around the sumptuary laws by lining simple cotton garments with the richest fabrics or by wearing robes which were deceptively simple in appearance but which were extremely labor-intensive to produce. Brocaded fabrics, ikat dyed textiles, shibori (tie-dye), stencil, and resist-dyeing; needlework—any number of textile weaving, dyeing, and decorating techniques were used in this quest for self-expression. Kimono pattern books were also produced (Fig. 16) which provided the decorative design for some extant robes (Fig. 17 and Slide 8).

In part because the Tokugawa period is relatively recent, the Art Institute owns a wealth of Edo kimono. Aside from an extensive collection of Noh garments, the museum houses a number of exquisite garments which would have been worn in everyday life. Kimono, like the colorful nineteenth century furisode (Fig. 18 and Slide 7), were worn by young girls on special occasions. The skills of many individual textile workers were required to produce such a robe: weavers, dyers, embroiderers, and tailors all strove in unison to create the sumptuous and innovative designs.

Delicate pairs of gold and green aoi (wild ginger) leaves flutter down over vibrant crimson clouds against a blue sky. Golden threads meticulously outline these cloud forms. A pattern of bamboo is subtly woven into a monochromatic field. In the process of creating a robe, the patron, sometimes consulting a pattern book, would confer with the silk merchant to choose a design. Once the bamboo patterned white silk was decided upon, the fabric was cut and basted together to give the shape of the robe. The pieces were then disassembled and given to the dyer. Dyers used the resist-dyeing technique: in order to preserve areas of the white silk from the red dye, the dyer tied those areas off covering them with bamboo husks. Thereafter the blue field was dyed, tying off and covering the newly colored red areas. Finally, the dyed silk was given to the embroiderers. The scattered green leaves were embroidered in relief with colored silk thread. The golden cloud outlines and pairs of gold leaves were embroidered with silk thread wrapped in paper-thin strips of gold-leaf. The golden cloud "outlines" cover white lines left in between the red and blue dyed fields (the result of tying-off during the dyeing process). Finally, the fabric was reassembled and sewn to complete this stunning furisode.

This abbreviated description gives some idea of how labor-intensive and expensive high quality kimono production could be and still is.
Other robes in the Art Institute’s collection are decorated with squares of expensive gold and silver leaf (see Slide 2)\textsuperscript{15} and shibori (see Slide 9), providing a wealth of examples of the variety of techniques used to make these exquisite garments.

**Meiji period (1868 - 1912)**

The Meiji period (1868 - 1912) saw the upheaval of the entire feudal system so carefully put into place by the Tokugawa shogunate in the seventh century. After almost two hundred and sixty years of virtual isolation from the West,\textsuperscript{16} Japan was forcibly opened by the American Commodore Matthew Perry (1853) and his “Black Ships” (so called because the Japanese had never before seen steam ships belching black smoke). Japan then embarked upon a frenzied period of Westernization during which the last Tokugawa shogun was deposed and the emperor “restored” to his traditional ritual role of importance. The accompanying societal upheaval resulted in some rather unfortunate fashion anomalies (Figs. 19 and 20). Still the kimono prevailed.

One late Edo-earthy Meiji Uchikake (Fig. 21 and Slide 5) in the Art Institute’s collection shows a relatively recent example which nonetheless exhibits a striking continuity with the classical poetic textile tradition. This robe (which was designed to be worn open on top of another sashed kosode) is decorated with small, delicately embroidered natural and man-made motifs. Stylized clouds, lyrical landscapes, irises,\textsuperscript{17} other assorted seasonal flowers and grasses, butterflies, screens of state (Fig. 22), small paintings, and musical instruments, all sewn in jeweled tones, dot the iridescent sky-blue silk. Three small orchid-shaped kamon, or family crests are visible (one at the top of each sleeve and the third in the center of the uchikake, near the collar). These crest motifs, passed down through generations, are used to decorate clothing, lacquer objects, armor, and other assorted decorative accoutrements.
Taisho (1912 - 1926), Showa (1926 - 1989),
and Heisei periods (1989 - )

For the past one hundred years the Japanese have been flirting with Western culture. Due in part to its great expense, the kimono has largely been abandoned in favor of more “practical” Western clothing. The only type of traditional Japanese clothing that is worn widely today is the yukata, a type of informal, usually blue and white, thin cotton robe worn indoors in the humid summer months (or year round near Japanese hot springs or after the bath Fig. 23). Today, younger Japanese men seldom, if ever, wear formal traditional clothing, except during weddings, which are usually performed part in “traditional” Japanese wedding clothing and part in Western formal wear (Fig. 24). Young Japanese women wear kimono only for special occasions, usually traditional festivals and national holidays (Fig. 25).

Still, the kimono survives. Kimono have even influenced the arts of other cultures (Fig. 26). And new, contemporary Japanese kimono designs are still being made, some by artists designated by the Japanese government as National Living Treasures (Fig. 27). Perhaps the government hopes that the prestige of that title will inspire another generation of artists to continue the age-old tradition of producing these beautiful kimono, which have become emblematic of everything subtle and ingenious about Japanese design.

This essay can only hope to give a taste of the exhilarating variety of kimono types and patterns that have been worn throughout Japanese history. Interested individuals can refer to books listed in the bibliography for better illustrations and further, more in-depth, reading.
Endnotes

1 The Art Institute’s collection is documented in *Five Centuries of Japanese Kimono* (listed under The Art Institute of Chicago in the Bibliography), especially in Mary and Ralph Hays’ discussion “Noh Costumes and other Japanese Costumes in The Art Institute of Chicago,” pp. 20-40.

2 Ainu textiles are a topic in themselves and will not be dealt with in this Teaching Manual. For information refer to *Designs of Japan: Okinawa, Ainu, and Foreign Designs* (Tokyo and New York: Kodansha International, 1980).

3 Think of all the different types of specialized clothing that have developed in our own and many other cultures, e.g. wedding and formal wear; sports, school, and company uniforms; gang colors, etc.

4 For an 18th-Century, slightly idealized but most accurate version of the silk-making process, see James Ulak’s article “Utamaro’s Views of Sericulture” in *Five Centuries of Japanese Kimono* (listed under The Art Institute of Chicago in the bibliography), pp. 73-85. (See Slide 12)

5 The silk road is the long and arduous path by which silk-traders travelled from China to the West, extending from Chang’an (one of the two capitals of the Tang dynasty) to Rome.


7 *Obi* will not be discussed at any length in this teaching manual. Despite many changes in *obi* style, today’s *obi* tend to be made of thick silk, oftentimes brocaded and doubled-over to form a fairly wide, rigid sash.

8 Dramatic transformations (e.g. from normality to possession) can be indicated by slipping off the sleeves of an outer garment to display the brilliant imagery on a kimono worn underneath (refer to the actor in Fig. 11).

10 This imagery is discussed at length in Monica Bethe’s article “The Use of Costumes in Noh Drama” in Five Centuries of Japanese Kimono (listed under The Art Institute of Chicago in the Bibliography), pp. 7-19.

11 After about one century of contact, the Westerners were systematically excluded and all Japanese converts to Christianity persecuted until they publicly renounced their faith (which was seen as a threat to their filial duty as subjects of the shogunate).

12 From Helen Craig McCullough’s translation of Ise Monogatari, called Tales of Ise: Lyrical Episodes from Tenth Century Japan (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968), episode 9, pp. 74-75.

13 Karagoromo/Kitsutsu narenishi/Tsuma shi areba/Harubaru kinuru/Tabi o shi zo omou. (“Ha” and “Ba” were not differentiated in classical Japanese).

14 For an excellent introduction to the concept of pattern books, see Betty Y. Siffert’s article “Hinagata Bon: The Art Institute of Chicago Collection of Kimono Pattern Books” in Five Centuries of Japanese Kimono (listed under The Art Institute of Chicago in the Bibliography), pp. 86-94.

15 This robe also recalls the Eight Bridges scene from Ise Monogatari, see discussion of Fig. 13, above.

16 Only one port (the tiny island of Dejima near Nagasaki) was open to Westerners (a few Dutch traders), and contact with these foreigners was strictly regulated.

17 Once again recalling the Eight Bridges story from Ise Monogatari (see discussion of the Momoyama Nuihaku).

18 This so-called “traditional” Japanese wedding clothing is something of an anachronism, since it was invented during the Meiji period. The elaborate wedding clothes worn by the Japanese prince and princess during their wedding in 1993 were based on styles of the Heian period.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Era</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jomon period</td>
<td>10,500 - 200 B.C.E.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yoyoi period</td>
<td>200 B.C.E. - 250 C.E. (from this point all dates are C.E.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kofun period</td>
<td>250 - 552 C.E.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asuka period</td>
<td>538 - 645</td>
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<td>Nara period</td>
<td>645 - 794</td>
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<td>Heian period</td>
<td>794 - 1185</td>
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<td>Kamakura period</td>
<td>1185 - 1333</td>
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<td>Muromachi period</td>
<td>1333 - 1573</td>
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<td>Momoyama period</td>
<td>1573 - 1615</td>
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<td>Edo period</td>
<td>1615 - 1868</td>
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<td>Meiji period</td>
<td>1868 - 1912</td>
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<td>Taisho period</td>
<td>1912 - 1926</td>
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<td>Showa period</td>
<td>1926 - 1989</td>
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<td>Heisei period</td>
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classroom applications

The Japanese Kimono
by Barbara Goldberg

Classroom Applications

The following are suggestions for classroom discussions and creative activities centering on the Japanese kimono. The kimono is the starting point for exploring a range of topics in Japanese cultural history, as well as a springboard for multicultural discoveries in art, social studies, and language arts. Teachers from a range of disciplines will find multiple classroom uses that link art to a variety of subject areas.

By approaching the art object as both a bridge to other disciplines and as an exciting and instructive subject on its own, this manual is designed to be easily adapted to different grade levels and curricula. The ideas presented here should be altered, refined, or supplemented according to students’ ages, interests, attention spans, and abilities.
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Discussion Suggestions
Nine Areas to Explore with Your Students

1. Look carefully at the slides in this manual

Based only on what you see, already know, and can guess, what can you tell about these objects? Do they remind you of anything? What do you notice first upon seeing the kimono and why? Who do you think wore them? (where, when, and why?) What makes you think that? Without being able to touch the actual kimono, what materials and techniques do you think were used to create them? Who might have created them and why? Studying the complicated designs found on the kimono, do you think they are merely decorative or do they tell us something more? Which kimono is your favorite and why?

2. Use the Japanese kimono as a springboard for a multicultural experience

What can we learn about another country, its people, and culture by studying the works of art it produces? If we have never seen anything similar to kimono, how can we relate to them? Do our personal experience and knowledge affect our interpretation of unfamiliar art forms and images? Can we compare the Japanese kimono to anything in our own country, lives, and times? Or to those in other countries? Some examples for comparison might be: a Banjara embroidered kachali (backless blouse) from the Khandesh region of Maharashtra, India; a Nez Perce beaded and fringed hide dress from North America; or a brocaded huipil (shirt) from Mexico. What do they share in terms of form, function, design, materials, or techniques? What characteristics do these countries or cultures share?

3. Learn about Japan by studying the designs on kimono

How do the designs on the kimono relate to what we already know about Japanese culture, customs, and beliefs? What do the designs and colors represent? Do you think they have their sources in 19th-Century Japan, or are they more ancient and/or borrowed from other cultures? To what legends, stories, folk tales, events, seasons, moods do they refer? Are these same images used in any other Japanese arts? You may want to refer to the slides or to the Motifs from the Art Institute’s Kimono Collection (page 42) in this manual. Investigate these questions through books from your school’s library/resource center and by visiting museums which have Japanese collections.
4. Examine the techniques used in making kimono

When looking at a kimono, we are struck by the visual beauty and power of the object. The mastery of the artists who possessed the skills and experience to create the fabric and design is equally impressive. Discuss the kimono in terms of technique. They were constructed from woven fabrics which were created by complex weave structures. Various techniques and materials were then employed to further embellish or decorate the surface, such as: dye, paint, needlework, applied metallic leaf, resist techniques, etc. Refer to Decorative Techniques (page 62) in this manual.

In addition to understanding and appreciating kimono in terms of technique, another goal is to become more sensitive to fabrics in everyday life and to question how things are made. Look at what you are wearing and ask: is it woven or knitted, printed or painted? How many colors were used and what images or patterns are present? Look at textiles in museums, at home, while shopping, in books, and magazines. You can even collect examples of different fabrics and bring them to school to share with the class.

5. Explore the idea of clothing and costumes

Looking carefully at the kimono in the slides, do they look like everyday clothing or do they appear more like traditional, maybe even special, garments? Explain your answer. Discuss everyday clothing and clothing for special occasions. Who wears costumes, when, and why? Discuss the traditional clothing of various countries and cultures (sari from India, dashiki from Africa, etc). What do these traditional clothes tell us about the person wearing them? Look at clothing depicted in works of art from other cultures and times, i.e. 17th-Century Dutch paintings, classical sculpture, or Mesoamerican pottery. Notice the variety of styles, materials, and designs used, and the accessories which complete the ensembles. How is each garment a reflection of the place and time from which it comes?

When looking at pictures or slides of clothing, particularly the kimono, it is important to remember that they were made to be worn. When worn, they look quite different than they do in pictures or slides. Try to imagine someone wearing the kimono, possibly layered over or under other garments and how the fabric would fall. Think about the Noh costume being held stiffly in place due to its weight and construction, or moving in dance or with simple body motion. Look at Japanese prints of people wearing kimono and note how varied the clothing is. Describe how you would look, feel, and move if you were to wear a kimono. Refer to Woodblock Prints (page 50) in this manual.
6. Talk about the importance of costumes in the theater

In Noh Drama, consider the costume and its function and design in relationship to the performance. Refer to the article by Monica Bethe entitled: “The Use of Costumes in Noh Drama” in *The Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* listed in the bibliography. In it she discusses the elaborate rules for the clothing worn by various characters, as well as what the robes represent or symbolize. In Noh theater, because the stage is simple and almost bare, the costumes create atmosphere and mood, function as a stage set, and become the primary visual focus. They also serve as props and identify characters. The plays often include verbal references to types and parts of clothing, actions related to dressing, or textile production and care. The designs on the costumes are usually directly related to famous and well-known stories in Japanese literature, such as *Tales of Ise* or *The Tale of Genji* (listed in the bibliography).

Discuss the use of costumes in the drama of other cultures and times. What do the costumes reveal about them? Consider: Greek theater, medieval miracle and mystery plays, Elizabethan theater (Shakespeare), English Restoration period, and commedia dell’arte (Italian). The costumes, for the most part, were simply the clothing worn at the time when the plays were first performed and later became an integral part of the drama. This holds true for Noh costumes as well.

7. Discuss family crests

Called “kamon” or “mon,” they are used on kimono as part of the design, to identify the family, or a particular Noh actor. Mon are generally simple and bold in format. Research what they symbolize and how they relate to the family they represent. Compare these family crests to the Coats of Arms found in European countries. The simplicity and boldness of the crests can also be compared in design to Girl Scout and Boy Scout merit badges. Imagine if some of the crests were actually merit badges—what skill or activity do you think they would represent? Refer to *Family Crest Diagrams* (page 48) in this manual.

8. Explore other cultures, times, and countries where textiles (fabric or clothing) are considered important or special

Consider the textiles of Africa, Native Americans, or Colonial America and discover what makes them special. Was the cloth believed to possess power? What did it represent? In what customs and rituals were the textiles included? Do you see examples of special fabrics or clothes in your life or culture? Some examples might include: a christening gown or quilt which is an heirloom passed down from generation to generation; the bridal tradition to “wear
something borrowed, something blue...”; a party dress for special occasions only; an athlete’s lucky t-shirt; a Jewish prayer shawl; or a priest’s vestments.

9. Discover events that took place at the time when these kimono were created

The majority of the kimono in the slides were made in 19th-Century Japan. Locate Japan on a map and consider its geographic relationship and size to the United States. For size comparison refer to the Maps (page 4) in this manual. Research what life was like in Japan during the 1800s. What were some major world events at that time? What interesting and/or important events occurred in the United States in the 19th-Century?

These events can be put on a time line. Some examples are: the first printing of poems by Edgar Allan Poe (1827); McCormick patented his famous reaper which revolutionized American agriculture (1834) and later moved his factory to Chicago; in 1853 Commodore Perry sailed into what is now Tokyo and the U.S. became the first Western nation to establish relations with Japan since the country had been closed to foreigners in 1683; the start of the Civil War with Lincoln as president (1861); the first electric light company was formed by Edison (1878); the first professional football game was played in Pennsylvania (1885); the Spanish-American War (1898).

Two good resource books for students to find this type of information are: The Encyclopedia of American Facts and Dates and The Timetables of History, both by Bernard Grun. These books are available at most bookstores or check your school’s resource center or local library.
Activities: Six Approaches to Explore with Your Students

1. Create a kimono within this outline

Show students slides or pictures of kimono and discuss the use of design and color. Distribute photocopies of the Kimono Outlines on the next two pages. Discuss how this shape was viewed as a “canvas” to be decorated by an artist and ask your students to create an original design for one. Explain that a variety of approaches can be taken in filling the space with a design. Some examples: all-over design; upper half and lower half each with its own design; one main design extending from shoulder area curving down one side toward the hem; designs appearing primarily at sleeve ends and hem. Refer to Kimono Designs (page 34) in this manual. The subject matter for the design is unlimited and may be represented in a realistic, stylized, or abstract manner.

1. Ask students to base the design for their kimono on what they remember from the slides. It may be the particular kimono which they liked most, just part of a design, or an idea that appealed to them. Remind students to interpret it in their own way and not to copy what they saw.

2. Many of the designs in the slides were based on nature or seasons. Have students choose their favorite flower, plant, animal, or insect to include in a design. Or they may choose a season or scene to represent in a visually interesting way within the kimono outline.

3. Tell students to think of something from their own personal life that would make a good design for a kimono. It may be based on events in their lives, interests or hobbies, dreams or goals, families or pets, houses or neighborhoods.

4. Students may use a favorite movie, song, book, poem, TV show, product, game, or fairy tale as the basis for a design. Ask them to think carefully about how they could do this most effectively.

5. Have students design a kimono for themselves, someone in their family, a friend, teacher, or someone famous (athlete, star, singer, politician, etc.). They should be prepared to explain why they chose the images, colors, and designs for that particular person.

These projects can be drawn on the 8 1/2” x 11” photocopied outline you supplied and then enlarged to full size (adult or child) on roll paper. This project can be done individually or in small groups. The final results may be shared with the entire school in an exhibition by hanging the finished full size paper kimono on a clothesline with wooden clothespins in a hallway.
Kimono outline
II. Compare a kimono with a garment from another time or country

By comparing objects from various countries, times, cultures, or geographic regions one can explore cultural diversity with its fascinating similarities and differences. Initial expectations are often turned upside-down upon further investigation and reflection. This multicultural experience may be initiated by comparing the Japanese kimono with a garment from another culture, such as: a Sioux Ghost Dance Shirt, a garment from the Akha hill tribe of northern Thailand, a 17th-century Russian festival dress, a Balinese dance costume, or a riga (man’s robe) from Nigeria. Any of these garments can be compared on many levels:

- Country of origin, culture, date of the garment
- Worn by whom, where, and for what purpose
- Shape of the garment
- Sources for designs/images appearing on the garment
- Materials and techniques used in making the garment

Suggested activities:

1. Students can be shown several different garments without any additional information other than what they see. Let the students make comparisons based on what they see, what they know from other sources, and what they can guess using their own intuition and imagination. They can choose the categories on which to base their comparisons or, if they need help, you can supply the categories suggested above.

2. Ask students to do research based on one of the kimono from the slides. They should then choose another garment with which to compare it. It can be another garment from Japan’s past or present; or the kimono can be compared to a garment from another culture, century, country, or geographic region. The students should be able to answer the following questions: How is each garment a reflection of the place and time from which it came? How do the different garments relate to each other? What other characteristics do the two cultures share? This comparison may be presented orally or as a written report; individually or as a group project.

3. Have students design a garment for a “fantasy” country with its own culture, rituals, and characteristics. The students should be able to explain what influenced the design, when and by whom it would be worn, and how it represents the place from which it comes. The description may be oral, written, or may take the form of a drawing or actual garment (scale model or full size).
4. Ask students to choose one material, design, technique, or garment shape and see how many different cultures share that same characteristic. The students should explain the similarities, or slight variations which occur from culture to culture, and may wish to hypothesize as to why this happens.

5. Encourage students to collect and cut out pictures or photos of clothing or costumes from other countries and times. Ask them to bring the pictures to school, so they can create a giant collage for the classroom. The students may also bring in costumes or traditional clothing from other countries or dolls wearing such costumes, to share with the class.

Please note: Information regarding traditional clothing is available at libraries and bookstores. If students have family members or friends who are from countries other than the United States, they may want to ask them about the traditional clothing worn.
III. Use the kimono as inspiration for personal expression

For centuries artists have been inspired by the artistic work of others. After carefully studying the magnificent kimono in the slides, let these works serve as the inspiration for students’ own creative expressions. The students’ creations can be based on their general impression of the kimono, one particular kimono, or an individual design element. Ideas may be expressed in various forms, such as: words, visual images, dance (movement), or all three.

A. Explore the kimono through words

1. Students can write a story based on one or more of the images found on a kimono. Choosing a season, object, or scene, they should describe what “happened.” The story may take the form of a mystery, adventure, biography, fantasy, or even a newspaper report and may be written from a historical perspective (based on research), or be a fictional account (coming from the student’s imagination). Another alternative would be to let it take form as a song.

2. Ask the students to write a story from the point of view of the kimono itself (first “person”). Have them give the kimono a personality and human traits. Where did it go and what did it see? Was someone wearing it or did it have an independent life of its own? Or the story may be from the point of view of the person who wore the kimono, designed it, or actually made it. Who was he/she and what occurred?

3. Rather than a story, students can try the above (or a variation) in different poem forms, such as: alphabet, cinquain, acrostic, concrete, and haiku. Refer to Poetry Forms (page 38).

4. After researching the literary references depicted on a particular kimono, or the Noh Drama in which the kimono is worn, students can tell the story in their own words. Or they may enjoy making up their own creative modern-day version based on the actual story.

5. Dividing the class into 4 or 5 groups, have each group write a play or single scene which is inspired by kimono in general or a particular image found on a kimono. Another alternative would be to use a kimono as a prop or to have it function as part of the stage set. Give the students a time limit in which to work, encouraging creativity with a focus. They can take turns performing for the entire class, having someone introduce the play by title and the characters or parts included.
Explore the kimono through words: **Poetry Forms**

1. **Alphabet poem:** uses a consecutive sequence of letters from the alphabet.
   
   **K**imono, so beautiful
   **L**ining the walls
   **M**ake me happy - and feel I
   **N**eed one for myself!

2. **Cinaquin:** is a poem that has five lines with specific instructions for each line.
   
   line 1: a noun (topic of poem)
   line 2: two words describing the noun
   line 3: three words telling actions of the noun
   line 4: four words giving a thought or feeling about the noun
   line 5: a word that means the same as the noun

   Iris
   Purple, beautiful
   Decorate, dance, dazzle
   Makes me think of spring
   Flowers

3. **Acrostic:** a poem or series of lines in which certain letters, usually the first in each line, form a name, motto, or message read in sequence.

   **FAN**
   Feeling warm
   **A**nd shy, I
   Never showed my face

4. **Concrete poem:** fills or outlines a shape that represents the idea with the words of the poem expressing that idea.

5. **Haiku:** a Japanese lyric poem usually of a fixed, 17-syllable form that often simply points to a thing or pairing of things in nature that has moved the poet. It is written in three lines consisting of: 5 syllables, 7 syllables, 5 syllables.

   The fragrant orchid
   Into a butterfly’s wings
   It breathes the incense  (By Matsuo Basho)
B. Explore the kimono through **visual images**

Kimono are visually rich and inspiring, and are wonderful sources which can be easily and endlessly explored in the visual arts. The suggestions listed below can be completed in any medium, such as: pencil, ink, chalk, paint, thread, fabric, or linoleum block. The resulting images may be realistic, stylized, or abstract.

1. Ask students to choose one kimono from the slides and to carefully study its designs, colors, and textures. Then, using all of those elements as inspiration, they should create an original work of art. It should not be a design for another kimono, but rather an image which is interesting in its own right.

2. Using a single design element from one kimono, give the students the following options from which to choose: enlarge the image so it fills up an entire sheet of paper; repeat the image many times creating rows or blocks of the design; alter the image by changing the shapes, colors, or adding additional designs. Refer to the section entitled *Motifs from the Art Institute’s Kimono Collection* (page 42) in this manual.

3. Have students create a painting or drawing where a figure in a kimono is part of the composition. It can be the major focus of the work or be a minor component. The painting can be purely decorative and imaginative, or it can realistically represent a scene from everyday life or one from a Noh drama.

4. Ask students to choose a photograph of a plant or insect on which to base a design. They should be inspired by the way Japanese artists interpreted nature as seen on the kimono. It may be fun to use only cut-paper shapes, adding detail with colored markers afterwards.

5. Have students create crests for their families. They should be based on something meaningful or important to each family. Looking at the Japanese “mon” for inspiration, they should try to keep the design simple and bold. Refer to *Family Crest Diagrams* (page 48) in this manual. Or the students may explore the designs used in Japanese family crests by combining several into an interesting composition or just play with the shapes and images, adding others from their imaginations.

6. Give the students origami paper, small patterned wrapping paper, or wallpaper scraps (old sample books are often available from wallpaper stores) and ask them to create a paper kimono. They should feel free to cut up, rearrange, and add bits of other materials to the design. Using ink, marker, or crayon, details can be added later.
7. The images found on the kimono are common to Japanese culture and are used to decorate a typically Japanese garment. Using a typically American garment, the t-shirt or sweatshirt, have the students choose a well-known story, game, or product as the source for a design. An outline of a t-shirt or sweatshirt could be given to the students in which to create their designs; or they can, using textile or acrylic paints, apply their designs to an actual article of clothing.
C. Explore the kimono through movement (dance)

Have students study the kimono shown in the slides. Talk about the layering of garments, how they were worn, and how the actual fabric feels to the touch. To encourage creativity and imagination, while at the same time not letting the students feel too self-conscious, you may want to try the following suggestions as a group activity. After doing several as a class, individual volunteers or small groups might be willing to perform for the class.

1. Have students pretend they are wearing a kimono and let them demonstrate how they would move, march, or dance in it. Refer to Woodblock Prints (page 50) in this manual. Discuss how this movement might be different than how they would move while wearing their regular school clothes.

2. Ask students to bring in a long robe or shirt. Pretending it is a kimono, have them create a dance with that garment. The dance can include putting on the kimono, actually wearing it, or just using it as a prop. This can be performed as a solo, with several students, or all together as a group. It might be fun to play the music used in Noh drama or Japanese songs while they are dancing.

3. The kimono is the final product of much work. Refer to Woodblock Prints (page 50) in this manual. The woodblock print by Utamaro is one from a series of prints which shows the various steps in the production of silk. For further reference and an opportunity to see the entire series, you may wish to consult The Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies, Volume 18, No. 1 listed in the bibliography for more on this fascinating process. After discussing with your class all that goes into making a kimono, ask your students to become mimes and to act out, through carefully thought out motion, raising silkworms, collecting cocoons, spinning, and weaving the silk fabric. Another option would be for students to pretend to cut-out, decorate, and sew a kimono. What body motions would they have to go through to show all these steps?

4. Verbally describe some of the images used on kimono and have students recreate those images through dance, simple movement, or static poses. Examples might include: floating clouds with undulating tails; large overlapping ocean waves; a paper fan opening up and closing again; bamboo trees and leaves; plum blossoms floating on turbulent waters; rows of flowers; dragons chasing the sacred jewel; an iris growing and blooming; butterflies flying; etc. Refer to Slide Descriptions (page 87) in this manual.
Motifs from the Art Institute’s kimono collection
Motifs from the Art Institute’s kimono collection
Motifs from the Art Institute's kimono collection
Motifs from the Art Institute’s kimono collection
Motifs from the Art Institute's kimono collection
Motifs from the Art Institute's kimono collection
Family crest diagrams
Woodblock print by Tsukioka Kogyo (see slide 11)
Woodblock print by Kitagawa Utamaro (see slide 12)
IV. Discuss the kimono as a work of art

We can discuss kimono in the same way we would talk about paintings, prints, drawings, architecture, sculpture, ceramics, or any other work of art. They all share the same basic elements: shape, line, texture, value, and color. If any one element were changed, the whole painting or kimono would change. All the parts work together as one unified statement or expression. (Additional areas for discussion are: variety, unity, contrast, balance, repetition, dominance, subordination, perspective, movement, proportion, negative and positive shapes, space, etc.) Whether the art object is made of clay, metal, fabric, paint, ink, plastic, or pastel, it is a creative expression waiting to “speak” to the viewer. If we just take the time to look at it and think about it, we will discover much about the object, the artist(s), and ourselves. If we do some further investigation, we will learn even more.

1. After viewing the kimono in the slides, refer to Discussion Suggestions (page 27) numbers 1-3 in this manual. Consider these for classroom discussion or assign individual questions to groups of students to explore.

2. Divide students into two groups and show them two slides: one kimono and another work of art in a different medium. Have one group list similarities and the other group list differences; discuss. Another option is to have several smaller groups each choose one category to use for their comparison of the objects, such as: color, design, medium, technique, etc. This could also be an individual assignment, having each student choose one kimono to compare to any other work of art.

3. Some works of art are created by one anonymous artist, some are signed and very much the work of a single famous (or not so famous) artist, while others are created by more than one artist. How does this affect the actual object and how does it affect our perception of it as a work of art? What other works of art were created by an anonymous artist? (some early American quilts, African textiles, and folk art) What other works of art are the results of the combined efforts of several artists/craftspersons? (many murals, large public sculptures, tapestries)

4. Discuss how the media chosen by the artist (paint, fiber, or clay) affects the impact and final outcome of the image created. How does the image and the material it is made of become one and inseparable? What if a kimono were made from clay, metal, or paint? How would that change our feelings about it? What is the difference between two dimensional and three dimensional works of art? (2-D has height and length and is essentially flat; while 3-D has height, length, and depth and is made to be looked at from more than one side.) How does this
affect the way we look at and relate to seeing an actual kimono, rather than a print or painting of one?

5. Just as painting and sculpture have changed over the centuries, so have kimono changed. Ask students to investigate the changes in kimono, from its first emergence as a garment, to the masterpieces seen in the slides, to the kimono being created today, both in Japan and world-wide. These changes are evident in shape, design, materials, techniques, and use. Students may choose to do research in a specific area of change, such as design or color; one limited time frame or emperor’s rule; or kimono as interpreted in other media through time.

6. Much can be learned about another culture and its traditions through the careful study of its arts. Ask the students to draw, study, and research other examples of textile arts. Students may compare kimono to other textiles from other times and places. Some possibilities for comparison include: European tapestries, Amish quilts, African weavings, San Blas Island molas, Early American samplers, or contemporary textiles from around the world (costumes, wall pieces, sculptural forms, etc.) How do they vary in technique, materials, use, and intent of the artist who created them? What do they tell us about the people and their traditions?
Kimono from the Art Institute’s collection (see slide 7)
V. Examine three weave structures:
plain weave, twill weave, and satin weave

When carefully examining the kimono in the slides, one realizes that there are often several design motifs occurring simultaneously. The most obvious pattern is generally the embellishment which is added after the fabric is woven, taking the form of stitching, painting, stenciling, etc. These decorative techniques will be discussed in the following section. Look past these techniques and examine the fabric itself. It is often a complex pattern of interlocking shapes superimposed with flowers. Such patterns are part of the structure of the cloth itself, created as it is woven on the loom. The design is subtle and often monochromatic (one color), the patterning apparent only as light reflects off the surface.

The woven fabrics used for the kimono in the slides are quite complex, yet the students can get some idea of the weaving process by exploring three basic weave structures: plain weave, twill weave, and satin weave. Many different fibers and looms can be used to explore these structures, but to really understand the process, all the students need is paper, pencil, scissors, and a ruler. Refer to the sections Weave Structure Definitions and Weave Structure Diagrams which follow. Have the students study the diagrams and track one horizontal “weft” and discover how it moves over or under each successive vertical “warp.”

1. Most students have made woven mats using paper strips. They have probably used the plain weave without even realizing it. Give each student two sets of 1/2” construction paper strips: one color for the vertical warp (held together along the top with adhesive tape) and another color for the horizontal weft (which the students will weave in row by row in an “over-one, under-one” sequence) — so they can create a PLAIN WEAVE paper fabric.

2. If students are familiar with the plain weave, they may proceed to a TWILL WEAVE structure as illustrated in the diagrams which follow. The sequence here is “under three, over one.” The trick is to have the “over one” stagger one warp to the right in each successive row. Thus, starting “under three” in the sequence changes with each weft row inserted. Other weave structures such as SATIN WEAVE or SATIN DAMASK WEAVE may be explored, if time and interest permits. Making use of simple paper materials, beautiful woven patterns can be created based on these and other more complex weave structures.
3. Upon completion of one of the above exercises, students can further embellish their “weavings” by painting, drawing, or pasting on top of the woven surface images from nature (plants, insects, birds) or images of objects (fans, bridges, ribbons). Other experiments can include: using the same color for both warp and weft; using various colors for each weft inserted; varying the width of the strips of paper used for the warp or weft; weaving with decorated papers such as wallpaper or wrapping paper. Students may also want to try to create other designs (shapes or pictorial images) by varying the manner in which the weft is inserted. Of course, simple looms and yarn may also be utilized.
Weave structure diagrams

Plain weave

Twill weave
(3/1 warp-float faced twill weave)

Satin weave
(7/1 warp-float faced satin weave)

Satin damask weave
(4/1 satin damask weave)
Weave Structure Definitions

A weaving consists of two sets of interlacing threads. The threads stretched lengthwise and attached to the loom are called WARPS. The crossing threads interwoven with the warps row by row by the weaver are called WEFTS. The way the warps and wefts interlace with each other is known as a WEAVE STRUCTURE. It can be very simple, as in the plain weave, or can be quite involved, with multiple sets of threads interlacing in very complex systems. Some kimono fabrics in the slides make use of additional (or supplementary) sets of warps or wefts, often creating intricate designs which look like needlework. Three basic weave structures will be described below: plain weave, twill weave, and satin weave.

1. **plain weave**: a textile with a uniform unbroken surface; an even, flat weave with no woven patterning. By varying the spaces between the threads, the fabric can be dense or open; by varying the color of the threads, striped or checkered fabric will result. An example is a cotton button-down shirt.

   (1/1: one weft passes over one warp, then under the next warp, repeat)

2. **twill weave**: a weave where a diagonal is created by each successive row of floats. If the warps and wefts are of the same color, the pattern will be apparent due to the way it reflects light. An example would be denim jeans.

   (3/1 warp-faced twill weave is the most common - with one weft passing under three warps, then over one, repeat)

3. **satin weave**: another kind of float weave where a smoother, more lustrous surface is formed because more floats are created with fewer interruptions. The SATIN DAMASK WEAVE shows a strong self-pattern formed by the contrast of warp and weft-float areas on the same surface. Generally, a satin damask weave is reversible. When a satin weave is used in conjunction with other more complicated weave structures, including additional warps or wefts, the results can be quite lavish. A linen damask tablecloth would be a good example.

   (7/1 is common, with one weft passing under seven warps, and over one warp, repeat)
Please note: For additional information regarding weaving, including more technical descriptions and structural variations, many excellent books are available in libraries and bookstores (a few are listed in the bibliography). These descriptions and diagrams are intended to give you and your students a general understanding of several basic weave structures used in the making of textiles.
VI. Explore four decorative techniques used to embellish kimono

Much of the appeal of kimono is due to the techniques used to decorate them. The weave structure is often quite decorative in itself, but what usually catches our eye are the amazing images drawn in vibrantly colored stitches, bright dyes, shimmering gold leaf, and slightly raised circles. The techniques used to create the images are very old, and yet we often see examples of them today on clothing, in home accessories, and in contemporary textile art.

Quite complicated techniques and materials, along with years of experience, are necessary to create what is seen on the kimono in the slides. The kimono are masterpieces of the art and serve to inspire. Students can, however, experience and understand some of the processes with commonly available supplies and simplified techniques. As they try some of the techniques, their enjoyment and appreciation of the kimono designs should increase tremendously. Refer to the sections Decorative Techniques and Needlework Stitch Diagrams which follow. The designs to be used for the techniques below may be based on those created for other activities in this manual, variations of them, or any other designs you find suitable.

1. Needlework
Materials: silk or cotton floss or thin yarn, fabric or heavy paper, needle, scissors.

Method: Ask your students to study the Needlework Stitch Diagrams which follow on page 63 and to practice the basic stitches on a scrap of fabric or paper. When they feel confident, they should decide on a simple design to use and draw it lightly with pencil on the fabric or paper. They can then choose stitches and colors that best suit their image and complete the needlework. Using an embroidery hoop makes stitching on fabric a bit easier, but it is not necessary.

2. Stencil
Materials: stencil paper, very thin cardboard or acetate, paper or fabric, tempera paint or fabric paints, fine sponge or foam rubber.

Method: Students may choose a simple design made up of separate island-like shapes and draw it onto the paper which they will be using as a stencil. The design should be carefully cut-out, using the tip of a sharp scissors (older students can use a mat knife) leaving the background intact. Dipping the sponge into paint (or dye) and first blotting it on scrap paper so paint is not applied too heavily, lay the stencil over the fabric and lightly press the sponge over the cut-out areas of the design. Do not move the stencil until design is filled in with the
paint or the image will blur. Carefully lift the stencil away and the
design should be complete. Other stencils and colors can be used after
the first design is totally dry.

3. Shibori
Materials: fabric, dye or colored ink or food coloring, thread, needle,
rubber bands.

Method: Have students stitch around a simple shape with running
stitches and carefully pull it tight, gathering the stitches. Wrap more
thread around this gathered puff, and tie the thread off. Dip the fabric
into the dye or apply the dye heavily with a thick brush. When dry,
take out the stitches and open the fabric to see the design area which
had been protected by the stitching. An easier method is more like tie
dye where only small areas of fabric are pinched between the fingers
and rubber bands are wound tightly around the fabric. Continue the
process using the same dye methods as described above.

4. Resist
Materials: stickers, tape, or rubber cement, fabric or paper, fabric
paints, watercolors, markers, or crayons.

Method: Your students may create a design on fabric using stickers or
tape (on paper, rubber cement can also be used). These act as the
“resist,” protecting the surface from the paint (or crayon, markers)
which are then applied over the entire surface. When the surface dries,
carefully remove the stickers and tape (lightly rub the rubber cement
off the paper). You can now clearly see the design formed by the
resist. Hint — keep the application of the paint fairly light, or it will
soak through and seep around the resist from the underside.

Variation: Students can use a white or light color crayon and draw a
design on paper. When they are finished, a wash of tempera paint or
watercolor (using a dark color) can be brushed over the entire surface.
The light crayon will act as the resist and keep the paint from reaching
through to the paper. Shapes can also be outlined with crayon,
and the interior can be painted, with the crayon line keeping the paint
inside the shape (like the “yuzen” technique in the paste resist descrip-
tion found in Decorative Techniques (page 62).

Please note: As with any complicated technique, you should first experiment before trying it with a class. If
your class is really interested in pursuing these techniques, there are many books that go into much greater
detail and use more sophisticated methods, some of which are listed in the bibliography. These simple exer-
cises are meant only as an introductory experience.
Decorative Techniques

1. **Immersion (Dip) Dyeing:** used to dye a full length of cloth or batch of yarns one color.

2. **Painting:** with dyes or pigments (paints); free-hand or within an outlined pattern and background.

3. **Shibori:** (tie-dye) a method of resist dyeing, and the name of the fabrics produced by that method. The pattern is reserved by compressing or squeezing the cloth and securing it against dye penetration before dipping the cloth in the dye bath. The resulting pattern is characterized by blurred outlines and a puckered surface. The various methods used are: binding, stitching or folding, and clamping. Often, the small shape to be saved is outlined with a row of tiny stitches which are pulled together tightly and knotted. This part is then tightly wound with thread to protect it from the dye bath, after which all the threads are carefully removed.

4. **Applied Metallic Leaf:** (surihaku - literally “impressed metallic leaf”) a small pattern is cut into a stencil, which is laid on top of the fabric, into which an adhesive is applied. After the stencil is removed, gold or silver leaf is pressed into the glue, with the excess brushed off the surface.

5. **Needlework:** silk or cotton floss sewn onto the surface of the fabric. Commonly used needlework stitches used on kimono are: stem, satin, long and short, couching, and French (or Chinese) knot.

6. **Paste Resist:** paste is applied to the background of the fabric leaving the pattern areas exposed to the dye bath. The paste protects the fabric from the dye. Also used to outline shapes which are then painted in with dye, thus preventing the dye from spreading beyond the shape and giving it the characteristic fine white outline (yuzen technique).

7. **Tsujigahana:** combination of primarily shibori, with additional free-hand painting, metallic leaf, and sometimes needlework. The designs are usually floral.

8. **Ikat:** (yarn resist dyeing) prior to weaving the fabric, this technique involves tying (or wrapping) sections of bundled yarn in a predetermined color pattern. These bundles of yarn are then immersed in a dyebath. The dye penetrates the exposed yarn, while the tied sections remain protected and undyed. There is a characteristic blurred or fuzzy-edged appearance to textiles decorated or treated with ikat. The warps, wefts, or both can be dyed in this way.
The Japanese Kimono

glossary of garment terms
Garment Terms

aiji: A long kosode, usually patterned with shibori, which is worn by women under an uchikake.

atsuita: A stiff compound-weave fabric where the motifs are large and bold. Also, the Noh costume made from this fabric and worn for male roles.

atsuita karaori: A kosode made of an atsuita fabric that has additional patterning which resembles needlework. Used as an under robe for male roles and as an outer robe for female roles in Noh theater.

choken: Literally means “long silk.” A loose, unlined cloak often made of gauze weave fabric, with the front and back panels attached at the shoulders only.

furisode: A variation of the kosode with long, hanging sleeves; now worn by children and young unmarried women on special holidays.

hangiri: A full trouser with bold patterns and similar to oguchi, but the back is stiffened with an inner lining of woven reeds.

haori: An informal 3/4-length outer coat which is worn over the kosode.

kamishimo: Literally means “upper and lower.” Consists of two garments — jacket and trousers. The “upper” is the katagitu (literally means “the silk covering the shoulders”) and the “lower” is the haka-ma (the full-cut trousers).

karaori: A compound-weave fabric characterized by long, floating wefts resembling embroidery. Also, the type of Noh costume made of this fabric and worn as an outer robe for females roles.

kimono: Term of ancient origin, meaning literally “the thing worn.” Now it refers to the modern descendant of the kosode.

kosode: Forerunner of the modern day kimono characterized by narrow openings for the hands at the sleeve ends. The word kosode (small sleeves) refers to the small wrist opening, not to the width of the sleeve itself. It is also a generic term used in the same way that kimono is used today.
nuihaku: A kosode patterned with both needlework (nui) and impressed metallic leaf (surihaku). Used mainly for female roles as inner or outer robe; or inner robe for males.

obi: A sash, used to adjust the length of the kosode and to help keep it closed.

oguchi: A skirtlike trouser, plain or patterned, with large pleats in the front and stiff panels in the back.

osodemono: Outer garments which have wide sleeves and a large opening for the arm.

sashinuki: Long pleated trousers which are gathered at the ankles and worn over oguchi.

surihaku: Literally “impressed metallic leaf.” Metallic (gold or silver) leaf pattern on cloth, often applied by spreading an adhesive through a stencil and pressing the leaf onto the glue. Also, the type of Noh costume made of this kind of fabric and worn for male roles.

uchikake: A formal outer garment which is worn unbelted over the kosode.
The Japanese Kimono

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Japanese Art - Kimono/Textiles


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**Japanese Art - General**


*The Arts of Asia: China, Korea, Japan*. Teacher Services, The Department of Museum Education. Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1993.


Japanese History


Japanese Literature and Theater


Maruoka, Daiji and Tatsuo Yoshikoshi. *Noh*. Hoikusha, 198-


The Japanese Kimono

Bibliography for Younger Students
Bibliography for Younger Students

Please Note: The following list contains historical and art historical books about Japan; folktales, myths and stories from Japan; contemporary tales (set in Japan or with Japanese protagonists); books about Japanese Americans; books that teach children about art and art museums; and books filled with craft projects. Most are either in print or available at your public library.


Favorite Japanese Stories for Children.


_______. Journey to Topaz. 1971.
_______. A Jar of Dreams.
_______. Samurai of Gold Hill. 1972.

Uchida, Y. Dancing Kettle. 1949.
_______. Magic Listening Cap. 1975

Walsh, Kathleen A. Teachers' Planning Guide to the Art Institute of Chicago. Chicago: Department of Museum Education [Art Institute of Chicago], 1984.

Watkins, Y. So Far From the Bamboo Grove. 1986.


For Further Information, Books, Materials, Films:

Aiko's Art Materials Import Inc. 3347 N. Clark, Chicago, Illinois 60657

The Asian Outreach Program Oberlin Shansi Memorial Program, 208 Wilder Hall, Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio 44074

The Center for East Asian Studies The University of Chicago, Pick Hall 121, 5828 University Ave., Chicago, Illinois 60637-1515

Children's Bookstore 2465 N. Lincoln Ave; Chicago, Illinois 60614

Japan Film Center 333 E. 47th St., New York, New York 10017

The Japan Foundation The Water Garden, 2425 W. Olympic Blvd., Suite 620E, Santa Monica, California 90404

Japanese American National Museum 369 E. First Street, Los Angeles, California 90012

The Museum Shop (The Art Institute of Chicago) 111 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60603-60611

Shiseido Cosmetics (America) Ltd. 900 Third Avenue, New York, New York 10022

Educational films available for loan showing Heian Court life, the Muromachi Period and Noh drama, the influence of Kabuki during the mid-Edo Period, and the “Hinamatsuri” Doll Festival.

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings Smithsonian Institute, 955 L’Enfant Plaza, Suite 2600, Washington D.C. 20560

Women and Children First 5233 N. Clark Street, Chicago, Illinois 60640
The Japanese Kimono
Slide Descriptions

SLIDE 1

Nuihaku (Noh costume)
Momoyama period, 16th century
160.6 x 133.1 cm; 63 1/4 x 52 3/8 in.
Restricted gift of Mrs. C.H. Worcester, 1928.814

Silk, plain weave; patterned with itajime (a resist-dyed technique using carved wooden boards), impressed gold leaf and embroidered with silk in satin, single satin, surface satin, and stem stitches; couching. The intervals (spaces between) of the bold lozenge motifs called matsu kawa bishī, the pine-bark lozenge, have vignettes of scenes recognizable as literary references and still-life compositions of various plants and flowers. The flower and scenes depicted have symbolic implications with numerous wishes for good fortune. A few areas have been re-embroidered at a later date. Lined with red silk, plain weave; dyed with beni, safflower, now faded to orange.

This nuihaku was altered at a later date to conform to the style of that era. Fragments of another Momoyama nuihaku were used for an extra outer panel on each sleeve and at the hemline to lengthen the robe and to create the points at the front of the hemline. The patterning of this fabric is “fan papers” and flowers.

SLIDE 2

Nuihaku (Noh costume)
Middle Edo period, 18th century. Additional patterning added in the late Edo period, early 19th century
169.6 x 136.1 cm; 66 3/4 x 53 5/8 in.
S.M. Nickerson Fund, 1964.272

Silk, warp-float faced 4/1 satin weave; patterned with impressed gold and silver leaf and embroidered with silk in satin, single satin, and stem stitches; laid work and couching. Lined with purple silk, plain weave.

Originally the design on this robe consisted of the all-over checkered design, ishidatami, the embroidered fans, a repeated crest, mon, and rectangular poem papers, tanzaku. In the nineteenth century, a spiral thread made of silk floss Z-plied was couched down the center of the poem papers and around their edges, transforming them into planks. Embroidered iris and water currents were added to create a vignette that illustrates the Yatsuhashi chapter of The Tales of Ise, which takes place near a plank bridge in eight sections surrounded by blooming iris.

SLIDE 3

Nuihaku (Noh costume)
Late Edo period, early 19th century
175.1 x 137.5 cm; 68 7/8 x 54 1/8 in.
Restricted gift of Mrs. Clyde M. Carr, 1930.19

Silk, warp-float faced 7/1 satin weave; patterned with impressed gold leaf and embroidered with silk and gold-leaf-paper-strip-wrapped cotton in satin and single satin stitches; laid work and couching. Lined with red silk, plain weave; dyed with beni, safflower, now faded to orange.

After the roundels (circular designs) were embroidered, the adhesive for the impressed gold leaf was applied through a stencil around the needlework in the center of the roundels.
SLIDE 4

Karaori (Noh costume)
Late Edo period, late 18th-early 19th century
162.8 x 133.2 cm; 64 x 52 1/2 in.
Gift of Mrs. Robert D. Graff, 1968.142

Silk and gold-leaf-paper strips, warp ikat (yarn resist dyeing), warp-float faced 2/1 twill weave with supplementary brocading wefts. The long floats resemble needlework. Lined with blue silk, plain weave, probably a replacement.

The checkered warp ikat ground is patterned with water aoi, mizu aoi, (wild ginger) and cadocks, kobone, alternately arranged in rows. Each row is divided by kasumi, a stylized trailing mist.

SLIDE 5

Ucbikake
Late Edo- Early Meiji period, 19th century
194.2 x 126.7 cm; 76 1/2 x 49 7/8 in.
Anonymous gift, 1958.756

Silk, warp-float faced 4/1 satin weave; embroidered with silk in satin, single satin, and stem stitches; laid work, couching, and Chinese knots; painted with gold. Lined with red silk chirimen, crepe; dyed with beni, safflower.

The embroidered motifs relate to the fifty-four chapters of The Tale of Genji by Lady Murasaki (with images of landscapes, butterflies, seasonal flowers, etc.) The crest, mon, is an orchid, ran.

SLIDE 6

Furisode
Late Edo period, 19th century
183.7 x 122.7 cm; 72 3/8 x 48 3/8 in.
Gift of Gaylord Donnelley in memory of Frances Gaylord Smith, 1991.635

Silk, 4/1 satin damask weave, rinzu (a satin damask weave with an equal balance between the pattern and the ground weave), yuzen dyed, painted, stencil, and embroidered with silk and gold-leaf-paper-strip-wrapped cotton in satin and single satin stitches; laid work, couching, and Chinese knots. Lined with red silk, plain weave; dyed with beni, safflower.

The rinzu has a pattern of a sayagata (repeated/interlocking) fret of swastikas (a design with ancient origins) over which is scattered a motif of either an individual orchid or a chrysanthemum. The rinzu has been yuzen dyed to create an all-over pattern of large mandarin orange trees, tachibana, and cypress fans, biogi, on which are scenes from The Tale of Genji.
SLIDE 7

_Furisode_
Late Edo period, 19th century
182.8 x 127.7 cm; 72 x 50 1/4 in.
Gift of Gaylord Donnelley in memory of Frances Gaylord Smith, 1991.636

Silk, 4/1 satin damask weave; _rinzu_; _oboshi shibori_ and embroidered with silk and gold-leaf-paper-strip-wrapped silk, in satin stitches; couching. Lined in red silk, plain weave; dyed with _beni_, safflower.

The _rinzu_ patterned with parallel trunks of bamboo trees and leaves has been resist-dyed in a cloudlike pattern and embroidered with pairs of _aoi_, asarum (wild ginger) leaves.

SLIDE 8

_Furisode_
Late Edo period, 19th century
183.8 x 128.8 cm; 72 1/4 x 50 3/4 in.
Gift of Gaylord Donnelley in memory of Frances Gaylord Smith, 1991.637

Silk, 4/1 silk damask weave; _rinzu_; embroidered with silk and gold-leaf-paper-wrapped silk, in satin stitches; laid work, couching, and padded couching. Lined in red silk, plain weave; dyed with _beni_, safflower.

The _rinzu_ is patterned with a _sayagata_ fret of swastikas over which is scattered a motif of either an individual orchid or a chrysanthemum. Embroidered blossoming plum trees extend from the hem to the shoulder.

SLIDE 9

_Aigi_
Late Edo period, 18th century
185 x 122 cm; 72 3/4 x 48 in.
Oriental Department Sundry Trust, 1940.1101

Silk, 4/1 satin damask weave, _rinzu_; tie-dyed. Lined in red silk _chirimen_, crepe; dyed with _beni_, safflower.

The _rinzu_ patterned with a _sayagata_ fret of swastikas (a design with ancient origins) over which is scattered a motif of an individual orchid or a chrysanthemum, is tie-dyed in _kanoko_, “fawn spot” _shibori_, with horizontal rows of a stylized design of flowing water called _Kanze mizu_. Scattered over the water is the tea-plant fruit crest, _chanomi mon_.

SLIDE 10

_Kosode_
Late Edo period, late 18th century
180.5 x 125.8 cm; 71 x 49 1/2 in.
Gift of Mrs. Robert D. Graff, 1957.154

Silk and gold-leaf-paper-strip-wrapped cotton, warp-float faced 4/1 satin weave with supplementary patterning wefts. Lined with red silk _chirimen_, crepe; dyed with _beni_, safflower.

There is an interlining of lightly wadded _mawata_, floss. This padded _kosode_ would have been for winter use.

This design of an all-over woven pattern of rows of dragons chasing the sacred jewel amidst stylized clouds is based on a similar Chinese design.
SLIDE 11

Woodblock Print
Tsukioka Kogyo
Early 20th century
Aoinue, from the series Nogaku hyakuban. Vol. 2, print no. 11
25.9 x 38 cm
Bequest of Henry C. Schwab Estate, 1943.834

In this scene from the Noh play Aoinue, the spirit of Lady Rokujo menaces the ailing Aoi, who is represented by a kimono laid on the stage. The pattern of triangles on Rokujo's upper kimono (suribaku) represent scales and are intended to suggest Lady Rokujo's serpentine and evil nature, which can also be detected in her horned, gnashing mask. Rokujo's dark-ground nuihaku is worn as skirts in koshimaki style over the suribaku, and is similar in its ornamentation to a nuihaku in the Art Institute's collection (slide 3). Note: this is a black and white slide of a color woodblock print.

SLIDE 12

Woodblock Print
Kitagawa Utamaro
c. 1802
Setting the Moths Free, from the series Josboku kaiko tewaza gusa (Women's Work in Silk Culture) Sheet 8
38.1 x 25.4 cm
Clarence Buckingham Collection of Japanese Prints, 1925.3253

This print belongs to a series of twelve prints which show the various steps in the silk-making process. This particular image shows moths (which are the source of silk) being observed, already having laid their eggs, flying off for the brief remainder of their lives.

The series of woodblock prints begins with two women brushing silkworm eggs into a hatching box with a feather and continues with women harvesting mulberry leaves, chopping and spreading the leaves onto the cocoon hatching trays, and transferring the well-nourished caterpillars onto another set of trays to lie dormant. The series continues with women examining the newly-spun cocoons, guiding the moths with a thread so they will lay their eggs on paper, watching moths fly off (as depicted in this slide), boiling cocoons, and reeling off the filament of silk. The last images show drying the coarse outer windings and making it into silk floss, grading and spinning the silk, and finally weaving the silk into cloth.

(Excerpted from The Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies, Volume 18, No.1 cited in the bibliography)
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