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**Japanese *Kosode* Fragments of the Edo Period (1615–1868):  
A Recent Acquisition by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York**

by  
Joyce Denney

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, recently acquired a remarkable group of over thirty-five Japanese textiles, the majority of which are probably pieces from *kosode* robes of the Edo period (1615–1868). This paper will serve as a brief introduction to the collection, which will be on view next summer in the Museum's Japanese galleries.

This introduction to the recent acquisition consists of three parts. The first part discusses a few of the pieces from the recently acquired group that have companions in the Nomura collection of the National Museum of Japanese History (Kokuritsu Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsukan) in Sakura, Chiba, Japan. The second part presents two of the earliest pieces in the group, one in comparison with a similar design in a *kosode* order book, and the other with special attention to technique. The final part focuses on early examples of the *yūzen* technique.

#### Comparisons with the Nomura Collection

Several of the fragments in the collection correspond to textiles used in the *kosode* screens of Nomura Shōjirō's famous collection, which is in the National Museum of Japanese History in Sakura, Chiba prefecture, Japan. Nomura Shōjirō (1879–1943) was a dealer in Japanese art of all types and a collector and connoisseur of Japanese textiles. He had an almost incalculable influence on the collecting of Japanese textiles, especially in this country, where museum collections from Los Angeles to New York benefited from patrons who had purchased textiles from him. In the early twentieth century, as Japanese textile collections were being sold, Nomura acquired fine robes and fragments of robes dating from the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries. Many of the garments were no longer complete, having been cut up into pieces for various purposes—perhaps for religious use, perhaps for mounting paintings, perhaps for other uses. Patiently, Nomura gathered fragments and slowly reassembled *kosode*. In one hundred instances where he could not recreate a complete garment, he hit upon the idea of making *kosode* screens in which the robe fragments were pasted to Japanese screens in the form of complete *kosode* hanging on robe racks. The *kosode* screens echoed a Japanese tradition of painted screens depicting robes on robe racks; however, Nomura's screens were not painted but made from actual *kosode* fragments.<sup>1</sup>

All together, twelve of the Metropolitan Museum's new textiles, about one third, correspond with screens from the Nomura collection.<sup>2</sup> A few of the correspondences will be discussed here.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul, "Creative Connoisseur," pp. 12–21.

<sup>2</sup> Maruyama, *Kosode byōbu*, illustrates the screens of the Nomura collection in the National Museum of Japanese History, Sakura, Chiba prefecture, Japan. The screens with matching textiles in the Metropolitan Museum are illustrated in plates 28, 37, 46, 57, 64, 75, 87, 90, 94, 96, 97 (right), and 98 (right). Four of the

A black silk textile with a pattern of grapes on an arbor<sup>3</sup> has a matching screen in the Nomura collection.<sup>4</sup> The Museum is fortunate to have three pieces of the textile. The two smaller pieces include the blue arbor design seen in the screen but not present in the larger piece.

A textile with a design of playing pieces from Japanese chess (*shōgi*),<sup>5</sup> also has a matching screen in the Nomura collection.<sup>6</sup> It was made from a silk textile woven in the technique of float-patterned plain weave (*saya*) that was shaped-resist (*shibori*) dyed in a vertically arranged pattern. Each roughly pentagonal game piece was reserved in white on the blue ground and inscribed with its name in ink.

One challenge presented by the Museum's new acquisition is to determine which part of the *kosode* each piece might once have been—was it part of the body pieces, the sleeves, the neckband, the front overlaps, or not from a *kosode* at all? The textile with *shōgi* playing pieces is fairly small and has four cut edges, which makes its position in the original *kosode* difficult to determine, but the identity of the next example is a little more clear. It features a pattern of grapevines and a bamboo lattice largely on a dark blue background on a white satin damask (*rinzu*) ground.<sup>7</sup> It also has a counterpart among the screens in the Nomura collection,<sup>8</sup> which shows a striking *kosode* with a pattern of grapevines partially on a white ground and partially on a dark blue ground. The Metropolitan Museum's fragment illustrates an important point: sometimes, as in this case, a piece in the new acquisition sheds light on a *kosode* of the Nomura screens.

The Nomura screens can occasionally be misleading because the placement of the fragments on the screens does not necessarily correspond to their former positions in the actual *kosode*. Luckily, the National Museum of Japanese History was aware of this dissonance and published diagrams of the shapes and dimensions of the pieces in the Nomura screen collages.<sup>9</sup> The diagram reveals that in the screen matching the Museum's textile, the placement of the fragments does not correspond to their former positions in a *kosode*. The screen gives the appearance of illustrating the wearer's left front portion of a *kosode*, including neckband, left front overlap (*okumi*) and the left front body section.

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corresponding screens are illustrated in Stinchecum, *Kosode*, a book that may be more readily available in the United States. There they are illustrated as catalog numbers 32, 33, 35, and 43 (right).

<sup>3</sup> Piece from a *kosode* with pattern of grapevine and arbor. Japanese, Edo period (1615–1868). Silk, metallic thread. Ground of black satin damask (*rinzu*). H. 26 5/16 in. (66.8 cm), W. 12 13/16 in. (32.5 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Roy R. and Marie S. Neuberger Foundation Inc. and several members of The Chairman's Council Gifts, 2000 Benefit Fund, and funds from various donors, 2001. (2001.428.8a)

<sup>4</sup> Maruyama, *Kosode byōbu*, pl. 46, p. 69.

<sup>5</sup> Piece from a *kosode* with pattern of Japanese chess (*shōgi*) game pieces arranged in vertical stripes. Japanese, Edo period (1615–1868). Silk. Ground of dark blue float-patterned plain weave (*saya*). H. 17 7/16 in. (44.3 cm), W. 13 5/8 in. (34.6 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Roy R. and Marie S. Neuberger Foundation Inc. and several members of The Chairman's Council Gifts, 2000 Benefit Fund, and funds from various donors, 2001. (2001.428.3)

<sup>6</sup> Maruyama, *Kosode byōbu*, pl. 37, p. 58.

<sup>7</sup> Piece from a *kosode* with pattern of grapevine on a fence. Silk, metallic thread. Ground of white satin damask (*rinzu*). H. 50 7/8 in. (129.3 cm), W. 8 3/8 in. (21.2 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Roy R. and Marie S. Neuberger Foundation Inc. and several members of The Chairman's Council Gifts, 2000 Benefit Fund, and funds from various donors, 2001. (2001.428.17)

<sup>8</sup> Maruyama, *Kosode byōbu*, pl. 75, p. 102.

<sup>9</sup> Maruyama, *Kosode byōbu*, pp. 184–209. The diagram for the screen of the *kosode* with pattern of grapevines and bamboo lattice is on p. 203.

The diagram, however, reveals no seam joining the purported neckband to the front overlap of the robe. The expected seam is simply not there, and the diagram indicates that the textile is continuous. What the screen probably presents, then, is the back of the *kosode* masquerading as the front. What appears to be the seam between the wearer's left front overlap and left front body section is really the center back seam of the original *kosode*.

Now consider the textile from the Museum's collection in relation to the matching *kosode* screen. The textile has the basic shape of a long triangle with a selvage on the long left side. Given the textile's shape, the presence of a selvage, and the fact that the patterning conforms to the shape, narrowing at the narrow end, the piece was probably part of the front overlap (*okumi*) on the wearer's right.

The information supplied by the Museum's new textile allows a rather different image of the color scheme of original *kosode* to emerge. When taken at face value, the *kosode* on the screen has a predominantly white background color, especially at the center front opening. When the screen is more properly viewed as showing the back of the original *kosode*, the background color of the robe is predominantly white on the back of the robe, with a dark blue background seen at the lower hem, rising in an arc from the lower left to the upper right. The back of the right sleeve continues the arc that begins on the back and is almost entirely on a dark blue background. The curve appears ready to continue to the front of the robe, and that is where the Metropolitan Museum's new textile comes in. The fragment is part of the front overlap on the wearer's right side and is largely on a dark blue ground. That fact suggests that the curving boundary between the white and dark blue backgrounds does continue to the front of the robe, reaching all the way to the center front opening at the edge of the right front overlap, and perhaps beyond. In other words, perhaps this *kosode* was originally mostly dark on the front instead of white, as it is presented on the screen.

One textile in the Museum's new acquisition, a plain-weave bast fiber (*asa*) with a pattern of blue and black vertical stripes punctuated with pairs of quatrefoils,<sup>10</sup> has a partner in the Nomura collection that is not part of a *kosode* screen. The fragment in the Nomura collection bears an inscription with a date corresponding to 1710.<sup>11</sup> It is comparatively unusual for a non-silk textile in the stencil paste-resist dyeing technique to be dated by inscription, and this date is early enough to be fairly notable.

## Two Early Pieces

The second part of this introduction to the Metropolitan Museum's new collection will focus on two of the earliest pieces in the group. The first is a satin fragment patterned in dyes and pigments with floral rosettes containing the character *hana*, meaning "flower," along with leaves and netting.<sup>12</sup> The vast empty space included in the

<sup>10</sup> Piece with pattern of scattered paired quatrefoils on a background of stripes. Ground of plain-weave bast fiber (*asa*). H. 47 5/8 in. (121 cm), W. 13 1/8 in. (33.4 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Roy R. and Marie S. Neuberger Foundation Inc. and several members of The Chairman's Council Gifts, 2000 Benefit Fund, and funds from various donors, 2001. (2001.428.34)

<sup>11</sup> Maruyama, *Kosode byōbu*, p. 154.

<sup>12</sup> Piece from a *kosode* with pattern of flowers, the character *hana* (flower), and a net pattern. Silk. Ground of off-white (formerly yellow) satin. H. 26 5/16 in. (66.9 cm); W. 13 3/8 in. (33.9 cm). The Metropolitan

textile is fairly meaningful. It suggests that the piece is from a mid-seventeenth century *kosode* of “the Kanbun type,” which is characterized by bold diagonal and arching designs with plenty of negative space. A similar design appears in a *kosode* order book from the collection of the Kawashima textile company of Kyoto that is dated Kanbun 4, corresponding to 1664. The order book is reputed to have been owned and used by the main branch of the Ogata family, who owned and ran the Kariganeya, a dry goods shop that catered to the highest-ranking people in the land. Included among the Kariganeya’s customers during this part of the seventeenth century was a pivotal figure, Tōfukumon’in (1607–1678). She was a daughter of the Tokugawa shogunal family who married the emperor Gomizunoo in 1623, thus joining the court and the shogunate. Tōfukumon’in’s daughter, grandchildren, and others in her circle formed the core of the Kariganeya’s clientele. The book records some of the orders placed at the Kariganeya.<sup>13</sup>

The design in the book that is very similar to that of the Museum’s textile<sup>14</sup> includes a net pattern, floral rosettes containing the character for flower, and an abundance of negative space. The only missing design element is the leaf pattern, which is found elsewhere in the same *kosode* order book,<sup>15</sup> revealing that patterns with leaves of this type were not unknown in robes of the mid-seventeenth century.

Examining the fragment and the first, strikingly similar design reveals that while the two are indeed very similar, they are in fact definitely not the same. The main differences are in the details of materials and execution. The order book indicates that the pattern is at least partially embroidered (specifying metallic gold thread and purple thread), that there is pale blue fawn-spot (*kanoko*) dyeing at the top, and that the background color at the bottom is *kurobeni*, a dark brown. None of these traits is found in the fragment, which features no embroidery at all, no spotted dyeing in light blue, and a background color that is most emphatically not dark brown. Note, however, that originally the ground color was not the off-white that it now appears to be: an edge that is not faded reveals that the background was once yellow. In summary, the high degree of similarity between the fragment and the design in the *kosode* order book confirms a mid-seventeenth-century date for the textile, but by no means asserts that the Museum has come into possession of a fragment of a *kosode* ordered from the famous Kariganeya.

The discussion of the second of the early Edo examples in the Museum’s new acquisition will focus on technique. This piece, with a pattern of palmettes on a purple ground,<sup>16</sup> probably dates to the mid-seventeenth century. The recent acquisition includes two pieces of this textile, the larger of which features a vast amount of negative space. However, originally, the space was a little less empty. Close examination of the piece revealed a few slightly darker areas in the now unpatterned expanse. The darker areas were in the form of sprays of palmettes similar to those rendered in shaped resist (*shibori*) dyeing, but smaller and on thinner stems. One possible explanation for these

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<sup>13</sup> Kawakami, *Miyako no mōdo*, pp. 340–341.

<sup>14</sup> Kawakami, *Miyako no mōdo*, p. 364.

<sup>15</sup> Kawakami, *Miyako no mōdo*, p. 370.

<sup>16</sup> Piece from a *kosode* with pattern of palmettes. Silk. Ground of purple satin damask (*rinzu*). H. 47 3/8 in. (120.3 cm); W. 14 3/8 in. (36.5 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Roy R. and Marie S. Neuberger Foundation Inc. and several members of The Chairman’s Council Gifts, 2000 Benefit Fund, and funds from various donors, 2001. (2001.428.2a)

darker areas is that they were formerly covered with embroidery; however, intensive searching revealed no needle holes. It seems likely, then, that the dark areas were once covered with metallic leaf in the *surihaku* technique. The leaf has since washed off along with the adhesive that bound it to the silk, but the ghost-like shadows remain. Metallic leaf was often included in *kosode* designs of the first half of the seventeenth century, and this fragment serves as a reminder that the *surihaku* technique did not suddenly disappear from *kosode* design with the rise of the dramatic uncluttered patterns of the mid seventeenth century.

### Early Examples of *Yūzen* Dyeing

The final part of this introduction to the Museum's recent acquisition focuses on early examples of the *yūzen* dyeing technique. The mature *yūzen* technique is characterized by the application to the cloth of fine lines of paste. The paste resists the dyes, which are brushed on after the paste dries. Even the ground color is brushed on. A hallmark of *yūzen* is the fine white lines that result from the paste resist process. With *yūzen* it is possible to achieve fine details, and products of the mature *yūzen* process often feature detailed pictorial patterns.

A piece from the Museum's recent acquisition with a pattern of landscape vignettes<sup>17</sup> dates from the late Edo period. It can serve as an example of the mature *yūzen* technique. (And, by the way, it also has a matching screen in the Nomura collection.<sup>18</sup>) The fine white lines and detailed pictorial pattern characteristic of *yūzen* are quite evident.

While early, middle and late Edo period textiles are represented in the Metropolitan Museum's recent acquisition, the heart of the collection is from the mid-Edo years, that is, from the end of the seventeenth through about the first three quarters of the eighteenth century. At the beginning of the mid-Edo period, the prevailing and continuing fashion was for highly decorative robes that were richly patterned in a combination of embroidery, *shibori* dyeing, and sometimes, stenciled *kanoko* spotted dyeing. The beginning of the mid-Edo period is also when the distinctly different technique called *yūzen* entered the scene. The two traditions co-existed for many years.

*Yūzen* did not spring fully mature from the brushes of Japanese dyemasters. Some *yūzen* pieces, especially those characterized as early, combine shaped-resist dyeing (*shibori*), which is associated with the earlier tradition, with the paste-resist and brush dyeing associated with the mature *yūzen* technique. The Museum's recent acquisition is rich in pieces from the middle Edo that juxtapose fine white lines in detailed pictorial patterns characteristic of *yūzen* with the less controlled shaped-resist (*shibori*) techniques in exuberant decorative patterns typical of the earlier (but continuing) tradition.

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<sup>17</sup> Piece from a *kosode* with pattern of sea and shore with buildings, trees, flowers, and boats. Silk, metallic thread. Ground of blue crepe (*chirimen*). H. 30 3/8 in. (77.2 cm); W. 10 11/16 in. (27.2 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Roy R. and Marie S. Neuberger Foundation Inc. and several members of The Chairman's Council Gifts, 2000 Benefit Fund, and funds from various donors, 2001. (2001.428.28b)

<sup>18</sup> Maruyama, *Kosode byōbu*, pl. 90, p. 119.

A fragment from the Museum's recent acquisition has a pattern of maple leaves in blue, yellow, and green on a ground of purple and white.<sup>19</sup> (It also has a companion among the Nomura screens.<sup>20</sup>) A close look reveals the fine white lines characteristic of the paste-resist *yūzen* process combined with the traces of stitching and gathering of the stitch-resist technique (*nuishime shibori*) from the older tradition.

Three pieces of a textile with a striking design of plovers in flight and autumn grasses<sup>21</sup> are included in the Museum's recent acquisition. (It, too, has a corresponding screen in the Nomura collection,<sup>22</sup> which is associated with an inscription dated to 1740.<sup>23</sup>) Again, the textile shows contrasting techniques and patterns—the comparatively realistic autumn grasses in *yūzen* techniques juxtaposed with the shaped-resist (*shibori*) dyed pattern of the freewheeling plovers and their purple ground.

Finally, another example in the Museum's recent acquisition seems to be the epitome of early *yūzen*, almost like a “missing link.” The textile is packed with ornament—paulownia, bamboo, and clouds<sup>24</sup>—and at first glance looks like a piece from a textbook example of a *kosode* in the decorative style that preceded and coexisted with *yūzen*. The textile pattern's paulownia leaves in fawn spot (*kanoko*) dyeing and its decorative golden clouds delineated with stitch-resist dyeing (*nuishime shibori*) are typical of the exuberant style that uses shaped-resist (*shibori*) dyeing techniques. A slightly more careful look shows that the dark blue bamboo leaves feature a fine white line in the center of each leaf and appear to have been paste-resist and brush dyed, as in *yūzen*.

These textiles and most of the rest of the recent acquisition will be on view in the Japanese galleries at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, next summer (currently scheduled for June 25 through September 27, 2003).

<sup>19</sup> Piece from a *kosode* with pattern of maple leaves. Silk. Ground of purple and white dye-patterned crepe (*chirimen*). H. 33 11/16 in. (85.6 cm); W. 10 11/16 in. (27.1 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Roy R. and Marie S. Neuberger Foundation Inc. and several members of The Chairman's Council Gifts, 2000 Benefit Fund, and funds from various donors, 2001. (2001.428.18)

<sup>20</sup> Maruyama, *Kosode hyōbu*, pl. 96, p. 195.

<sup>21</sup> Piece from a *kosode* with pattern of plovers (*chidori*) and autumn grasses on diagonal bands or triangles. Silk. Ground of dye-patterned float-patterned plain weave (*saya*). H. 30 5/16 in. (77 cm); W. 13 7/16 in. (34.2 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Roy R. and Marie S. Neuberger Foundation Inc. and several members of The Chairman's Council Gifts, 2000 Benefit Fund, and funds from various donors, 2001. (2001.428.26a)

<sup>22</sup> Maruyama, *Kosode hyōbu*, pl. 97 (right), p. 128. It is also seen in Stinchecum, *Kosode*, cat. 43.

<sup>23</sup> Kokuritsu Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsukan, *Jidai o kataru*, cat. 86, p. 91.

<sup>24</sup> Piece from a *kosode* with pattern of bamboo (*sasa*), and paulownia. Silk, metallic thread. Ground of dye-patterned satin damask (*rinzu*). H. 39 5/16 in. (99.9 cm); W. 12 5/8 in. (32 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Roy R. and Marie S. Neuberger Foundation Inc. and several members of The Chairman's Council Gifts, 2000 Benefit Fund, and funds from various donors, 2001. (2001.428.20)

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