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THE JINBAORI: ONEUPMANSHIP ON THE BATTLEFIELD

VALERIE FOLEY

There are very few absolute statements that can be made about jinbaori in the sociological, cultural or historical sense, except that they were worn only by males of the military class in military settings. Some believe that the jinbaori constituted a kind of formal wear, which vassals wore in audience with their lords, yet there is some evidence to contradict this - for example, the fact that very few portraits exist of men in jinbaori, while portraits of men in armor abound. Indeed, one scroll shows a lord in jinbaori, his retainers in armor. There are several theories as to which garment gave rise to the jinbaori. The dobuku and the yoroi hitatare are two possibilities. It is said that Momoyama period generals, who directed - less than engaged in - battles, wore jinbaori to distinguish themselves both to their troops and to the enemy. However, some pictorial evidence suggests that the rank and file also wore jinbaori into battle during the Momoyama, while other evidence would have us believe that jinbaori were not common on the battlefield, although they seem to have become standard issue sometime during the approximately 250 years of the harshly enforced Tokugawa peace.

One of the two primary purposes of the jinbaori was to give the wearer reinforced protection from the elements over his light armor. The other was to advertise the wearer and his dignity, fearlessness, prowess, worthiness and readiness in the face of death - and his wealth. Interestingly, we know that many armored warriors fought without jinbaori, and many jinbaori-clad warriors fought without armor.

During the long peace, one of the best showcases for the jinbaori was the procession to and from Edo as part of the sankin kotai - or alternate attendance - of daimyo at the court, one of the many ways the Tokugawa ruthlessly maintained both the peace and their preeminent position. Armor was regularly dispensed with during these lengthy processions - jinbaori were not.

Because so much about the jinbaori is still open to question, this paper will not touch upon jinbaori use, and the need for brevity precludes any lengthy discussion of design symbolism. Instead, the focus will be on physical permutations, in hopes of thereby revealing something about Japanese culture in the exuberant Momoyama period and the first century of Tokugawa rule - that is, from approximately 1550 to 1700.

The symposium abstract makes mention of the general rigidity of Japanese costume rules, and the contrasting spiritedness and originality of the jinbaori. This spiritedness and originality is evinced through unique shapes and techniques and such materials as yak hair, bear fur, tiger and leopard pelts, imported wool, Persian carpeting, peacock, crane and king fisher feathers, the then virtually unheard of cotton, and much sought-after Chinese silks.

Not coincidentally, many of the most interesting and best preserved jinbaori of that period also belonged to some of the names most closely associated with the formation of what is called modern Japan: Uesugi Kenshin (1530-1578), Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582), Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537-1598), Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542-1616), and the wealthy Date and Maeda clans. The slides shown depict jinbaori belonging to these individuals and families. These run the gamut of styles, techniques and materials prevalent during the 300 years of the Momoyama and Tokugawa periods. The financial and political power wielded by these people enabled them to freely express, through their jinbaori, the various trends of their times.

The slides start with four of Uesugi Kenshin's jinbaori, leading with the yak hair jinbaori.

Yak hair had to be imported, which made it a rare and precious commodity in Japan. In this jinbaori, bundles of long yak hair are folded in half and bound at the resulting thick end, then sewn, one by one, to a ground of white figured satin twill in patterns of nested boxes. With the exception of a straight top and bottom row, placement of the hanks is nearly random, with horizontal spaces anywhere from 2.5-4.5 cm. long, vertical spaces 4-11 cm. long.

The left and right front are sewn to the back at the shoulders - which immediately differentiates it from kimono construction, where there is no shoulder seam. The seam line is disguised by a pair of gold-wrapped threads. The sides are completely open, so we may imagine the wearer could easily slip this over armor if he wanted to. It has a lovely saffron-dyed tubular silk collar, stuffed with silk wadding, very much a departure from the traditional flat Japanese collar. Saffron was a very much sought after dye stuff, one, because its exorbitant cost make it a great status symbol; two, because it was believed to have a medicinal value when worn against the skin.

An unusual ankle-length piece, with a cut that closely resembles kimono tailoring, is made primarily of paper. In the slide, one can discern the edges of the four sheets of paper glued end to end on each side to form the body. Smaller pieces form the overlap - the long triangular wedge

shape between the collar and the body. The collar and the trim along the left and right seams are of brown silk, with part of the design formed of silver leafed paper thread, called ginran. The silk lining is woven of a yellowish weft and a deep green warp to form an iridescent spring green. At the center back seam, and where the paper and cloth meet, closure is achieved by hand stitching, attesting to the paper's strength. The paper itself has been treated with persimmon tannin, which toughens, waterproofs and darkens it. Unusual for jinbaori, the chest ties are secured on the outside, reflecting the lack of preconceived notions about jinbaori design at the time. Between the paper outer and the silk lining is a thin layer of silk batting. Very sober and understated, it is nevertheless very luxurious.

Another jinbaori, designated an important cultural asset by the Japanese government, is made of red and blue woven fulled imported wool. Since the first foreigners did not even arrive in Japan until Uesugi Kenshin had reached his teens, this was indeed an exotic material, although with the passage of time it became the most popular, perhaps because it was water repellent and heat retentive. To some extent, this jinbaori is very Japanese. It is cut like a kosode, and the different colored sleeves reflect a popular style of the times. The colors, however, are radically different from Japanese blues and reds, and the gold braid and red trimmings at the edges are alien to traditional Japanese dress.

Typical of Kenshin, a gorgeous green damask with chrysanthemums, peonies and arabesques, lines the inside of this outwardly simple piece. It is interesting to note that the narrow armholes would have made this unwearable over armor, so this is probably a good example of a strictly ornamental jinbaori.

The last piece from the Kenshin collection is a white silk jinbaori, hand-painted with a dragon undulating through clouds, designated an important cultural asset. It very much resembles a dobuku, given its shape and layer of batting, although it is a good 15-25 cm. shorter.

There is a fascinating, if not exactly tasteful, jinbaori that Nobunaga is said to have worn. The bottom is a pleated skirt of yellow Chinese damask. Two loops have been made for the purple silk cord simply by slashing the material. The feathers are pasted in alignment onto long strips of paper folded lengthwise, and these strips are sewn onto the base in a process resembling roof shingling. The papers have been dyed light blue, so that lost feathers would not leave jarring white spots. Upon careful inspection, one can see that the bottom fifteen or so rows are perfectly horizontal, but with the introduction of the butterfly motif, the rows take on a gradual curve until, as

they approach the top, they can be seen to radiate in a semicircular manner from the neck, which helps to emphasize the circularity of the butterfly's wings. The butterfly, appropriately for a culture cleaving to the austere tenets of zen Buddhism, can be seen as a symbol of the evanescence of life, but also of metamorphosis and rebirth.

The standing collar, which imitates western design principles, is ringed inside and out with tiny white striped feathers, and between these are sandwiched two layers of nubbly chirimen silk crepe and one layer of patterned white silk, all tightly bunched, resembling a small ruff.

Hideyoshi is the only figure in this paper who started life with neither title nor illustrious background, who worked his way up to de facto ruler of Japan and who, perhaps because of his painfully humble origins, had an insatiable appetite for luxury and ostentation unmatched by his peers and successors.

One of his jinbaori is very much in keeping with Japanese armor. The scales are made of boiled leather. Most are coated in black lacquer and threaded with purple silk cords. The upper eight rows of the back, however, are covered in silver leaf, and threaded with white silk cords. Across the shoulders runs a band of chain mail.

Hideyoshi also had a delicate tsujigahana piece, variously called a jinbaori or a dobuku, depending on the source, which beautifully illustrates one facet of Momoyama period aesthetics.

The cut of another piece appears time and again, with modifications, among Hideyoshi's jinbaori. It is basically a kosode cut, though short and sleeveless. Peony and vine designs, rendered in supplementary threads of gold and silver leafed paper, and yellow and purple silk with base wefts in cotton, run in broad horizontal stripes of about 14.5 cm., indicating a high degree of sophisticated labor. The warps are all silk. Like several others worn by Hideyoshi, this luxurious and painstakingly executed textile is thought to be Ming Chinese. It marks one of the earliest appearances of cotton into Japan since the Nara period. Hideyoshi also owned a cotton jinbaori, an unusual material for such jackets. One might speculate that while cotton was initially a rare and treasured commodity, it lacks the body that seems to have been preferred for jinbaori. As the Edo period progressed, cotton became a much more commonly cultivated crop, and was used among lower ranking warriors. Another important cultural asset, it consists of two layers of white cotton, between which is a thin layer of padding, and these are quilted together with minute stitches in white thread, forming numerous interlocking geometric designs. This was an art brought to the peak of perfection by the

English, so it is suggested that this jinbaori may have had its origins in the British Isles. Hideyoshi's paulownia crest, which, not coincidentally, is a near copy of the imperial crest, is rendered in red wool with green chain stitch embroidery accents.

A jinbaori belonging to the British Museum, and said to have belonged to Hideyoshi, has a design of a target on a background of stripes, all rendered in feathers. The feathers are taken from the copper pheasant, green pheasant, and an unidentified species of drake. In contrast to the previous feathered jinbaori, the feathers in this piece have been pasted directly onto the garment, not sewn or woven, and the central target figure has been appliqued on. The body of the garment is made of hemp, the lining painted with undulating gold ribbons.

Another feathered piece of Hideyoshi's is made of cock feathers, and bears another of his symbols, the bottle gourd. Note the fine round cut of the feathers, which bear none of the choppiness evident in Nobunaga's butterfly design jinbaori.

Among the best known of Hideyoshi's jinbaori, also an important cultural asset, is perhaps the only extant jinbaori styled from a tapestry weave Persian carpet. This piece is believed to have come from the Kashan region, between present day Teheran and Isfahan.

Mr. Ohta Eizo points out that the Portuguese, Dutch and English were all known to be trading with Persia during the reign of Abbas the first - 1587-1628 - and that it was probably via the Europeans that this treasure came into Hideyoshi's hands. It bears typical Persian motifs - cartouches, feline predators, attacking stags, etc., rendered in silk thread. Scarcely visible to the naked eye are unbacked flat gold and silver threads.

The animals, with the exception of some of their spots, are not accented this way, but the cartouche background colors are. It is not always easy to distinguish the difference between the gold and silver, which would seem to indicate a high level of impurities in the metals. When new however, one can imagine what a dazzling impression it must have made, especially with such aggressive and alien themes.

Ohta makes an especially interesting observation about the hanabishi, or flower diamond motif found in the design. This is not part of the traditional Persian design vocabulary, but on the contrary is an old favorite in Japanese design, and Ohta speculates that it might have been woven in as a special order by a European merchant to appeal to Japanese tastes.

The last Hideyoshi piece is really quite ghastly, but also very interesting in that it tells us something about the man and the luxuries of his period. It is a jinbaori which originally boasted more than 100 peacock feathers. It boasts a protective netting made of gold wrapped thread, a collar of white flowered brocade, a yoke of purple wool and a lining of vibrant red silk.

Ieyasu, first shogun of the Tokugawa line, was something of a clothes horse. For the most part he favored understated, refined, tasteful designs, but every extant piece of his wardrobe is notable for consummate skill in design, dyeing technique and color use.

One example is a very unpretentious looking silk jinbaori. From a distance, this sleeveless plain weave vest appears a solid light gray. On closer inspection, fine horizontal stripes can be detected, and a very close look reveals that the stripes consist of two pale blue painted lines - each no thicker than a single weft of fabric, between which lies a yellow interval about four wefts thick. The yellow portions were once entirely covered in silver leaf. The lining is made of the same material, and there is a thin layer of batting in between. Two discreet Tokugawa crests in couched gold wrapped thread are sewn on the chest, and one on the back.

Ieyasu also had a silk jinbaori made of the fabled tsujigahana touched upon earlier. The purple stripes are rendered in coveted murasaki purple. This piece clearly fails to conform to Ieyasu's previously mentioned high standards, given the numerous mismatched stripes and unceremoniously lopped off Tokugawa crests. It seems very likely that this jinbaori was converted, perhaps from a damaged dobuku or kosode, which in turn might indicate the depth of the owner's affection for it.

The jacket has two interesting decorative devices. One, which appears at first glance to be a pocket, is in fact a sword opening. In actual use, such an opening would not have held up well at all, given the delicacy of the fabric, so it seems fair to imagine that this jinbaori was used on ceremonial occasions only. The second is a pair of buttons, one at each shoulder. This contrivance appears in a number of large sleeved jinbaori, generally accompanied by a button loop at each wrist opening, presumably so the voluminous sleeves could be tacked up. However, no signs of actual use - such as creases, stripes of dirt, linear fraying, etc., are detectable, leading to the conclusion that while such buttons and loops lent an air of functionality, the primary purpose of jinbaori thus fashioned was to underscore the wearer's dignity.

The last piece from Ieyasu's collection is a gold leather cape. This jinbaori is believed to have been made of cowhide - not at all a traditional Japanese material, but one frequently used among Europeans. It is a radical departure from Ieyasu's usual understated style, and appears to be colored with gold paint. Made of eight wedge-shaped panels, it can be laid out flat, and forms a near semicircle. Two buttons at the front base and two button holes at the side seams allow for a fairly snug closure. As with many jinbaori, the strength of western influence is evident.

Another interesting feature is the fringe, made of an unknown vegetable fiber. Mrs. Kamiya Eiko speculates that it might be betel palm fiber, which is native to the Malay/Indonesia region.

The final few jinbaori are chosen from other illustrious names in Japanese history.

Two of the best known jinbaori are believed to have been worn by Date Masamune (1567-1636), whose name is associated with dandyism in Japan much the same way that Beau Brummel is in England.

Both pieces are made of woven brushed wool, in a technique called kirihame, or cut-and-put-together, which ingeniously takes advantage of the wool's tendency to resist fraying. In the first piece, little circles are cut out of the ground material and replaced with circles of identical size taken from lengths of wool in other colors.

In the second piece, the black body is cut at its base in a sawtooth pattern, and a red hem has been cut to fit the black base exactly. In kirihame the matching pieces are sewn together with such minute stitches that one can just barely see the impression in the wool left by the stitch, and it is completely impossible to determine the color of the thread employed. There are traces of a perhaps six-layered silk ruff at the neck, and some kind of decoration at the armholes can be surmised by remaining stitches. The braided stripes of sliver trim are not paper-backed, and are believed to come from the middle east.

Now a few spirited designs from the Maeda family. One, now labeled an important cultural asset, belonged to the first Lord Maeda (1538-1599). The ground is golden ribbed velvet, and the design, China's legendary Shoki the demon queller, is rendered in the applique and the large, soft loose embroidery stitching popular at the time.

Records show that the fourth Lord Maeda (1615-1645) had a jinbaori fashioned from crane feathers. The fifth Lord Maeda (1643-1724) owned numerous jinbaori of imposing

design, including one sleeveless wool piece with a body of alternating black and white triangles and a hem in stacked diamonds (these are favorite Japanese patterns known as uroko and matsukawabishi respectively), and another black wool piece with great rectangular sleeves and a huge red kirihome design called boar's eye dominating the back.

In closing, mention must be made of the astonishing red wool jinbaori worn by Kobayakawa Hideaki (1582-1602), whose every feature demands attention. Foremost are the menacing yet beautiful crossed scythes on the back, made in a combination of kirihome (white blades) and applique (black handles). Also breathtaking are the eccentric sleeves, which end in exaggerated sweeping arcs. The chest ties are devised in the shape of a torii, and in a final touch of splendor, unseen by the observer, a secret pleasure enjoyed by the wearer alone, embroidered on the lining within a large green ring is an imposing rendition of the character "eternity".