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## JAPANESE TEXTILES OF DAILY LIFE

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### INTRODUCTION

The main function of textiles in daily life is that of clothing. Along with food and shelter, clothing the body from the elements has been one of the most essential conditions since primitive times. Since the time when animal hides and plant parts were used to protect one's body from the external world, clothing has always been closely related to human life. Therefore, it can be said that clothes were invented and developed for daily use and, at the primitive level, one type of garment served all purposes.

At this level, the material and style of clothing were one hundred percent practical, and the materials selected were naturally the easiest to obtain according to geographical or climatic conditions. In Japan, bark fiber from wisteria and arrowroot plants were first used. Later, hemp became the primary fiber material for clothing, and remained so for some time.

As religion grew in importance the priests who conducted religious ceremonies achieved high status in society. It is likely that they wore clothes different from those worn by the general population as a means of ennoblement. This was the beginning of the division of clothing. Not only did the clothing worn in religious ceremonies differ, but gradually, the daily clothing worn by priests also changed. For example, silk became the material used in the daily clothing of the ruling class replacing bark fiber and hemp, which continued to be used in the clothing of commoners. In Japan, the division between the material used in the everyday clothing of the upper class and that of the lower class occurred early in its history and remained unchanged until modern times.

The history of daily clothing in Japan from a cultural point of view distinguishes between those who could change their clothing according to occasion and those who were unable to do so. However, there were those who, despite their low class rank in the feudal society, were wealthier than the ruling class. In Japan, the political rulers from ancient to medieval times (i.e. until 1200 AD), were the court nobles, and from medieval to modern times (i.e. 1868), the samurai held power. Merchants were the lowest class; yet their financial wealth allowed them to become economically powerful during the Edo period, or modern times.

Let us examine the daily clothes of each of the above-mentioned classes.

(1) Daily clothing of the common people

The common people of Japan such as farmers and artisans were forced to wear simple clothing up to modern times. Except for a small number of people, everyday clothing was all they had.

(a) The first condition for their clothing was durability. Worn not only within their homes, but also at work, their clothes needed to be sturdy. Materials that satisfied this requirement were few, the most common being hemp.

(b) Cotton was another major material used for common clothing, but it was not widely employed until a relatively recent period. Cotton was imported through China during the Muromachi period, or 14th century, but it was not until the 18th century that cotton was produced in any quantity within the country, thereby lowering its cost and allowing it to become widely used in the daily clothing of commoners.

(c) Because common people's clothing was worn for labor, practicality in design was also an important consideration. Material, shape and style were selected to match the type of work. For example, clothing for people who manufactured indoors, or farmed the fields, has tubular sleeves which were narrowed at the cuffs, and the ankle and the calf section of the *hakama* were much narrower than the thighs. This is very different from the comfortably styled daily clothing of the nobles, samurai and wealthy merchants.

(d) As we have seen, daily clothing of common people was characterized by its durability, economical and practical conditions, and material and processing methods were selected to match these needs. Most of these garments were undecorated, however, there are examples of textiles made for the common classes from the Edo period and later which display unique decorations, some more interesting than the high quality textiles of the upper classes.

The unique beauty found in the clothes of the common people, while secondary to the basic requirements of durability, economy of material and practicality, created a decorative vocabulary in its own right. For example, the methods employed in processing these textiles included strengthening the cloth by using recycled fabric scraps, resulting in decorative patterns in the material. Thus, the decorative elements in commoner's clothing was born out of practicality, whereas



decorative techniques used in the fabrics worn by the upper classes were purely ornamental.

(2) Daily clothing among the noble classes

Distinction between everyday clothing and formal attire first appears in Japanese history at the time of the division of the social classes and the formation of the aristocracy during the Heian period, from the ninth to the twelfth century. This distinction was, of course, instigated by the aristocrats. Known as "*Kuge*", or court nobles, they lost their social power after the thirteenth century, although their clothing remained almost unchanged despite this change in status. The everyday garments of the noble class are notably different from those of other classes as we shall see.

(a) Both men and women of nobility tended to wear simplified formal attire for their daily clothes. Formal attire consisted of several layers of garments and simplifying this to daily wear meant removing some of the many layers. For example, the women's garment called *junihitoe* or "twelve layers", was worn by all court women, from the empress to the wives of the aristocrats. The formal outfit was composed of a *hakama* or long divided skirt, and several layers of *uchigi*, or inner garments, above the underclothes, topped with an outer garment called *Karaginu* or Chinese cloth, and a *mo* or skirt. It received the name *junihitoe* because of the many layers worn, and in novels of the Heian period, there are tales of women who wore so many layers of clothing that it was too heavy for them walk.

In official ceremonies this was used as the formal outfit of noble women, but was simplified for everyday wear by removing the *karaginu* and *mo*. When they really wanted to relax, they would decrease the number of *uchigi*, and in extreme conditions such as when it was very hot, they would wear only one *hitoe* which is a thin garment without a lining, and a *hakama*. This was called *hadaka-sugata* or literally "naked figure".

The same phenomenon can be seen in men's clothing. Since the Heian period, noblemen's clothing was ranked according to the degree of formality for the occasion. A complete outfit was called *sokutai*, which was composed of *akome* or a short hemmed kimono worn above underclothes, *shitagasane* or a long hemmed kimono, *happi* or a jacket without sleeves, *ho* or outer garment, *omote-bakama* or large *hakama*, and a *sekitai* or leather belt with stone decorations. On their feet they wore *shitouzu* or socks, and shoes; on their head a lacquered headpiece. This kept the weavers and dyers very busy!

The *omote-bakama* of the *sokutai* was replaced with a *sashinuki*, a *hakama* with the ankles tied with a string which formed an outfit called a *hoko*. From this, the *shitagasane*, *happi* and *sekitai* were removed to form an outfit called *ikan*, or *tonoi shozoku* which was worn when the nobles were on night duty in the Imperial Palace.

These three types of costumes were all formal, though they differed in degree. the *ho* used in the *hoko* was a formal outer garment, and the color worn was determined by the class rank. In comparison, changing the *ho* to a casual outer garment called *noshi*, formed the *noshi* style which comprised the ordinary clothing of noblemen. Color and design were freely selected for *noshi*, and it could be worn only for private occasions or within the home, but it was not to be worn when visiting the Imperial Palace. Furthermore, replacing the *ho* of the *ikan* with a *noshi* created an even more simplified style of clothing and was suitable only for the privacy of the home.

As we have seen, the clothing of the nobility was composed of several layers of garments, the outer layer being the most formal, which could be removed or replaced with a simpler garment to create ordinary daily clothing. thus, in the clothes of the nobility there is little difference between formal and informal clothing in terms of the basic garment composition and textile content of each piece.

(b) Another interesting phenomenon in the daily clothing of the nobility relates specifically to social rank. When several noblemen of differing rank were present in the same place, the higher ranked men were allowed to wear informal clothing whereas those of lower rank were required to wear their formal attire - a bit of *noblesse oblige*.

(c) The color of the normal outfit was also restricted according to rank, whereas daily clothing had no color restrictions at all. Thus, the *ho* or outer garment of the *sokutai*, *hoko* and *ikan*, were called the "ranked outer garment" and the *noshi* was referred to as the "free colored outer garment". Because the color of the formal outfit was strictly prescribed according to rank, higher ranked nobles were allowed to wear lower ranked colors; however lower ranked nobles were not allowed to wear higher ranked colors. The color of daily clothing was freely selected according to the season or to personal taste and one could enjoy his or her own unique fashion, as well described in the tenth century novel, *Tale of Genji*.

(d) Colors and patterns could not be freely used in formal outfits but were allowed in daily clothing, however, the colors and designs used in even daily clothing gradually became fixed according to the age of the



wearer or the season. Also, a certain standard developed amongst the nobles regarding color choices for informal clothing despite the fact that there were no official restrictions placed upon color selection.

The colors used in the informal *noshi* style originally were quite varied, but from the end of the twelfth century, white for winter and blue for summer comprised the fixed color scheme. In general, youthful or low ranked nobles wore darker tones, and as they grew older or achieved higher rank, the tones became lighter. In contrast, higher ranked nobles wore darker tones in their formal outfits. There were probably a wide variety of patterns used as well, but gradually these became restricted to a few types.

Though not restricted by as many rules as that of formal attire, color and pattern used on daily clothing also came to be controlled by custom. If one wore colors or patterns considered to be improper for the wearer's age or rank, that person became an object of ridicule. Peer pressure was a strong factor in compliance to these court rules of dress.

(e) Members of the nobility needed to be well versed in clothing etiquette. A detailed study of precedents and customs in both formal and daily life was compiled after the thirteenth century, continuing from the medieval to the modern era. This was called *Yusoku kojitsu*, which instructed the reader in appropriate behavior and clothing according to specific situations. In this sense, informal clothing became an extension of formal behavior to meet the needs of those whose lives centered primarily around formal occasions.

### (3) Daily clothing of the samurai

The beginning of the Kamakura period at the end of the twelfth century saw the rise of the samurai government which remained in control until the end of the Edo period in the mid-nineteenth century. By the end of the Heian period, the governing power of the nobility decreased and as a result, many territorial battles occurred throughout Japan. The samurai were originally farmers, who took arms when needed, and gradually became half farmer/half warrior. Those with territorial ambitions and leadership abilities united the warriors of each region throughout Japan, the result being a samurai society centered around the shogunate. Officially, the highest class of society was that of the court nobility with the emperor at the top, but actually, it was the samurai who ruled.

(a) As the samurai rose in social rank, they copied the formal clothing styles of court nobles. However, their daily clothing continued to be

However, the samurai considered *yuzen-zome* to be unrefined and, therefore, unsuitable for their clothing. Among the new techniques introduced along with *yuzen-zome* was the plainer *shiroage* method in which the lines of design are left white by the application of a paste which acts to resist the penetration of the dye into the cloth. This was deemed to be a more suitable method for decorating samurai garments.

(4) The daily clothing of the high class merchants

The sixteenth century witnessed the rise of the merchant class, resulting from the end of civil strife and an expanding national economy. Especially during the Edo period, from the seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century, the merchants, despite their low placement within the feudal system, enjoyed a position of leadership due to their financial power. Their daily clothing differed from that of the nobles and samurai in several ways.

(a) When attending to customers in public situations, merchants wore plain cotton and pongee clothes, while in private they often wore colorfully designed clothes made of silk decorated with the most expensive and extravagant techniques.

In Edo period-early modern feudal society, merchants were placed at the bottom, below farmers and artisans. The shogunate regulated clothing appropriate for each class as a means of maintaining order. However, many merchants grew wealthy enough to afford extravagant clothes and resented feudal restrictions prohibiting wearing what they could well afford. Therefore, they obeyed the laws in public, but in private, these rules would be broken and they would wear whatever they pleased. The shogunate repeatedly passed laws restricting luxurious clothing, but these were often ignored, resulting in severe punishment for merchants.

(b) Despite sumptuary law, the merchants' admiration for beautiful clothing did not cease, and as soon as new techniques and designs were devised, they ordered new kimonos to wear sometimes in both public and private situations. The *yuzen* technique that was devised in the beginning of the eighteenth century was first used for merchant class women's clothing. Today it has become the most widely used technique amongst modern textile methods. *Yuzen-zome* was an epochal technique which enabled the use of a variety of colors and delicate designs. The merchant class preferred the flat, smooth touch of *yuzen* compared to embroidery or tie-dye, and the various colors and delicate designs were equally treasured, giving *yuzen-zome* its immense popularity.

Merchant class patrons demanded only the newest textile



derived from their farming background, and over the course of three hundred years, a style of clothing unique to the samurai developed in both their formal and daily attire.

For instance, in the Muromachi period (from the second half of the fifteenth century), each of the social classes except the nobility wore the *kosode* as an informal garment. Originally, the garment that was worn by the nobility for both formal occasions and daily wear was called *osode* meaning "large sleeves". This was in contrast to the narrower-sleeved garment called *kosode*, worn daily by commoners, and warriors. By the middle of the fifteenth century, the *kosode* was adapted by the samurai as formal wear. In emulation of the *Kuge*, the material used in the samurai formal *kosode* changed from hemp to silk in this era.

Samurai men combined a *hitatare* or *kamishimo* over the *kosode* as a formal outfit. Formal *kosode* did not differ much from the informal version, which was either plain, twilled or ikat (*kasuri*). Samurai women also wore *kosode* for both formal and daily clothing, but in formal occasions, an additional *kosode* was slipped over the first, the latter referred to as *uchikake*. Therefore, the *kosode* was an informal garment made formal by layering an additional *kosode* or another outer garment over it. This illustrates how formal wear amongst the samurai was an extension of their daily attire, just the opposite from that of the nobility.

(b) Color and pattern in the formal clothing of the nobility differed greatly from that in their daily attire: yet differences in garment shape were slight. In contrast, for samurai, formal and daily clothing were similar in color and pattern, as well as in the shape of the garment. This seems to be a natural evolution in the clothing of a group whose foundations lay in the simple farming lifestyle.

There was little difference between the formal and informal clothing of samurai women, although their garments were much more colorful than those of the men. Both samurai men and women were expected to be plain and honest - virtues which were to be reflected in their clothing. The samurai class wore a style of clothing that reflected their common class background, yet at the same time showed that they ruled over the farmers and merchants.

(c) This can be seen in the selection of decorative techniques. For example, the *Yuzen-zome* method enabled free expression of design and allowed for a variety of color choices although it lacked the textural richness of embroidery and tie-dye techniques. When it was developed, wealthy merchants rushed to make clothes utilizing this technique.



techniques as well as the latest designs. To meet these needs, publishers printed many kimono style-books called *Hinagata-bon*, which the drapery shops used as sample books. The *Hinagata-bon* always showed the latest designs, and occasionally were edited to feature a particular design currently in vogue.

(c)The merchant class wore the newest fashions as their daily clothing. Their formal attire consisted of plain cotton and pongee clothing when conducting business, or when they were in the presence of samurai, in accordance with the law. For the wealthy yet socially suppressed merchant class, wearing extravagant clothing for everyday was a means of confirming their power in spite of the rigidly hierarchical social system. In contrast, both the nobility and samurai tended to be more conservative in their daily dress during this time, in reflection of their satisfactory if docile position within the social structure.

#### CONCLUSION

So we see that throughout much of Japan's history, clothing was deeply related to the social system. Differences in material, technique and design reflected the peculiar social functions and characteristics of each class. What one wore depended to a large extent on who one was in society.

Japanese clothing is very different from Western clothing, but it seems that from the standpoint of textiles and clothing in general, it had a universality which transcends east or west. If we look, we can find a common thread in many things from ancient through modern times between Japan and the west despite their different histories, and clothing is no exception. Thanks to all of you, I have been given this opportunity to speak about daily clothing in Japan and its various meanings and functions within the social hierarchy. I hope that a greater awareness of the cultural importance of clothing is a goal we all share.