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THE CONVERSION OF CHINESE COURT ROBES INTO JAPANESE FESTIVAL HANGINGS

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INTRODUCTION
Decorated silken robes historically worn in China to garb the emperor and his family were disassembled and resewn in Japan into hangings for Kyoto's Gion Festival during the 16th to 18th centuries. The twenty robes, which were converted into coverings for festival carts called yama and hoko, include silk tapestry weaves (kesi), brocades, and embroidered examples. Eleven date from the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and nine from the early to mid- Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). This distribution contrasts with other world collections of Chinese imperial robes, in which Qing Dynasty examples are far more numerous. In addition to the robes, ninety-five early Qing rank badges were also imported. These were joined into vertical or horizontal strips to serve as borders or valences. Chair covers, table and altar frontals, and wall hangings, as well as prized weavings from a number of other countries in Asia as well as Europe, are also included in the Gion collections. There are a total of around 900 textiles of which approximately 300 are derived from foreign sources.

The robes and badges were acquired in their original form by fourteen of the approximately thirty-two neighborhood associations of the Gion Matsuri Yamaboko Rengokai (Gion Festival Float Association) which produce the Gion Festival (Matsuri) each July. Funds to acquire textiles were donated by the members over the centuries, often at great personal sacrifice, and even while recovering from Kyoto's periodic and devastating fires and floods. The formidable hurdle of the shogunate's Exclusionary Edicts (1616-1854), which prohibited the importation of foreign goods was also overcome. Presumably the neighborhood (cho-nai) association members had to cope as well with the ego and financial needs.
of local weavers and dyers, who had been the pageant's exclusive suppliers before foreign textiles became available (Kajitani and Yoshida 1992).

The townsmen who founded the associations were motivated by sincere spiritual fervor inspired by the festival's religious origins, a profound desire to express loyalty to community, a keen sense of neighborhood competition, and a deep-seated Kyoto tradition of homage to craftsmanship and beauty, particularly in the textile arts.

Fortunately, nineteen of the associations possess records, going back as far as 1576, of the member's donations to acquire, repair, rework, and back the textiles. Kita Kannon Yama possesses journals from 1724 (see illustration) which refer to an inventory of 1671, which has unfortunately been destroyed by fire, as have many record books of other cho-nai. Extant screens, scrolls, and panels believed painted concurrently with the textiles' adoption, seem to provide graphic corroboration of the existing documents (Okamoto 1972). Over the centuries, the festival has generated sufficient excitement to inspire repeated paintings, sketches, and since the mid-19th century, photography (Takagi 1907). The dates and descriptions inscribed on the old documents, official ship's cargo entries, graphic representations, as well as a preserved spectator's account from 1757, have been on the whole corroborative of one another (Kajitani and Yoshida 1992).

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**THE GION FESTIVAL**

The origins of the Gion Festival are said to have occurred in the year 869 when the Emperor enlisted the Head Priest of nearby Yasaka Shrine, at the edge of Kyoto's Gion District, to help him put an end to a long and terrible plague that had been decimating the inhabitants of the nation's capital. In the belief that the spirits of sickness and evil hovering about the city's atmosphere might be pierced and destroyed, tall sabers were placed atop carts and moved through the city streets. These scouring devices were the origin of the hoko, carts bearing towering red-draped structures.
nearly six stories high, whose massive wooden wheels continue to be pulled through the city streets each year at this time.

Concurrently a complementary structure was designed to beckon the health-bestowing forces of the powerful deity Susano-no-Mikoto, dynamic brother of the Sun Goddess, whose spirit was believed housed in Yasaka Shrine. These were platforms that the head priest directed be built so that treasured relics sacred to the shrine might be placed upon them. The platforms were also circumnambulated. As the platforms became formalized, a sculpted mountain and an actual young pine tree, both regarded as sacred abodes of the Shinto deities (kami) were added, fronted by tableaux of costumed mannequins depicting a favorite legend or play. These smaller structures, borne originally on poles by young Shinto priests (Yamanobe), and later by townsmen, became known as "yama" meaning "mountain" (Bauer and Calquist 1965).

Each of the constructions was named for the themes they presented. Since the end of the 15th century, the sides, front and back of the hoko and yama have also been draped with opulent textiles which were not related to their designated themes, but hung for purposes of grandeur and effect. Foreign fabrics were introduced by the 16th century, when international trade first made them available (Boxer 1986).

The spear-like hoko, during the three days of assembly and exposure, performed to attract evil spirits as well, and although unhealthy and unwanted vapors were intended to be pierced by their knife-like tips, many dangerous aspects were also thought to be absorbed into the decorations. This necessitated the urgent dismantling of these structures within hours of the procession's closing, and the speedy folding away of the decorative hangings before evil spirits had time to disperse. Until around 1200 A.D. the float and all its decorations were immediately ritually burned to prevent this disaster. By contrast, the yama served as celestial vehicles which were thought to facilitate the descent of the kami into the community, and were leisurely dismantled (Joya 1960). (Kishimoto).

THE FESTIVAL TEXTILES

By the 16th century the appearance and activities of the festival came more and more to reflect the interests of the merchants and artisans, who were becoming more numerous, influential and prosperous as the city grew in size [Yamane, 1973 #32]. Reflection of financial success in one's business or craft grew in importance as a festival goal. To accomplish this, increasingly opulent, showy, brightly hued fabrics were sought. The patterned silk and gold thread fabrics of imperial China were deemed especially appropriate. For a city of skilled weavers and dyers, Chinese textiles had particular prestige, acknowledged as supreme examples of the textile arts. As expensive imports, they projected the aura of the rare and exotic. At the same time their imagery was familiar and widely understood, linked over the centuries to mutually shared symbolism
The dragon motif was linked to the earliest history of the community. Before Kyoto was established as the capital in the year 794, the area was a modest agricultural settlement which held a "water festival" to celebrate the existence of a nearby spring and to appease the water deity, thus ensuring rainfall crucial to the rice crop. Later the concern developed that unsanctified or impure water was a source of pestilence and disease, a recurrent danger in midsummer (Yoneyama October). The dragon, in Japan as in China, was regarded the powerful rain-bringer and controller of the water supply, and thus served as the main symbol of the ancient festival. His image was carried forward and incorporated as icon of the Gion Festival. Court robes of the dragon throne, with their tapestried, brocaded, and embroidered dragons were therefore ideal decorations (see illustration). The large-scaled Ming dragons were appealing as they could be seen easily from the streets. It is thought that one reason relatively few Qing Dynasty robes were acquired was that their smaller dragon designs were relatively inconspicuous (Kajitani and Yoshida 1992).

Selection of cart draperies was also influenced by the dimensions of the sides of the conveyances. Several of the textiles imported were capable of being used nearly "as is". Evidently the court robes garnered admiration sufficient to inspire the members to tolerate the expenditure and trouble of disassembling them, cutting them into sections, and finishing them to create rectangular panels of the required sizes. Afterwards the drastically altered robes were backed with imported red wool fabric (rasha), which was allowed to extend several inches on all sides providing lively coordinated frames the hangings.

ROBE PANEL WITH EMBROIDERED DRAGON

ROUTES OF IMPORTATION

How did Chinese imperial robes come into the possession of the merchants and craftsmen of Kyoto? Interestingly, although there is extensive documentation in the records of the neighborhood associations related to member's financial contributions for the acquisition, repair, and replacement of Chinese and other textiles, there is total silence on the subject of sources of artwork. There are also intriguing gaps between the likely date of their production, probable dates of entry, and their first appearance on Association documents (Kajitani and Yoshida 1992).

Although many of the imported hangings unquestionably came into Japan legally, and in fact were openly reordered, a number of the textiles may have come in on ships that did not dock at official, patrolled, and taxed ports of entry. In addition, several robes were likely to have been gifts from traders and clergymen to provincial rulers (daimyo) who, as samurai, were strictly prohibited from engaging in trade. Utmost secrecy had to be maintained about commerce in rare and exotic items, which were known to have been gifts especially welcomed by individuals in power (Matsuda 1965).

The robes reached their Kyoto destination in sequential phases via varying paths. Their main ports of entry to Japan included the Ryukyu Islands in the south, Nagasaki in the southwest, and Hokaido Island in the north (see maps).

One clue to the southernmost route was revealed by the existence of a hanging derived from a Ming Kesi robe documented as having been transported from The Ryukyu Kingdom (present Okinawa Prefecture) in 1606 by Fukuchujōnin, a Buddhist monk who had journeyed to that island kingdom three years earlier. The robe, a gift from the Ryukyuan king, was donated to a temple. The Ryukyu Islands had a tributary relationship with China, entitling them to a profitable international trade, and occasioning their ruler's wearing of Chinese court robes for official interaction. The kingdom was ideally located between China and Japan, nations mutually prohibited to engage in direct commerce (deBary 1958). At the beginning of the 17th century the king was undergoing great military pressure from the daimyo of Satsuma in Kyushu, most southerly of the main Japanese islands, who coveted the lucrative sea trade of the Ryukyuans. The Ryukyuan king made several gestures of appeasement to the Japanese during these years including abundant gifts of Chinese textiles and other artworks (Kerr 1974). After a lapse of over two hundred years, a quite common gap in documentation, the regal robe brought back to Kyoto in 1606 turned up in 1817 recorded as a donation to Kuronushi Neighborhood Association, whose hoko proudly parades its converted form to this day (Kajitani and Yoshida 1992).

In 1609 the Japanese from Satsuma invaded the Ryukyuan capital, sacking and looting Shuri Castle and the nearby princely houses. This was likely yet another opportunity to round up Chinese court robes.
Confiscated Okinawan goods, as well as all future Okinawan imports from China, were thereafter channeled through Satsuma and labeled "local products" (Kerr 1974).

Later in the 17th century much of the balance of the Okinawan Chinese imperial wardrobe may have also been exported in bulk from Ryukyu to Satsuma. A colony of Chinese had been established in Okinawa for nearly three hundred years, having been sent there originally in 1392 to administer and acculturate the Okinawans. The Qing Manchu rulers, having delayed putting pressure on the Okinawan Chinese while preoccupied with consolidating their rule at home, finally insisted in 1682 that Okinawan Chinese follow the strict Qing Dress Regulations. However, since members of the Chinese colony identified with the subjugated Ming and detested the styles imposed by the hated Qing, they elected instead to switch to Okinawan costume, undoubtedly releasing chests-full of Chinese materials. Their Japanese oppressors in Satsuma were likely quite ready to channel these profitably to Kyoto and other Japanese cities (Kerr 1974). One cannot help but wonder if there is some connection between this fact and the appearance in the next decades of a veritable flood of nearly one hundred Chinese rank badges, which would eventually come to serve as border elements for the hangings. These badges, embroidered with the bird designations of civil officials of the Chinese Empire, were created sometime during the reign of the earliest Qing emperor, Shun Chih (1644-1661).

This second, better known port of entry, Nagasaki, was manned for the most part by foreign traders. This port, in Kyushu Island, served the Portuguese from 1571 to 1639, and thereafter the Dutch (Niwa 1980). Goods entered there with the costly cooperation of the local daimyo. Although there are no records of cho-nai members direct negotiations for court robes with foreigners, Kyoto merchants did visit Nagasaki to conduct business with the Portuguese and later, with the Dutch (Niwa 1980), both of whose cargo was mainly Chinese silks. On at least one occasion, in 1591, the Portuguese adventurers also visited Kyoto. Earlier, in 1559, their compatriots, the Jesuit priests, had already established a church in the capital (Matsuda 1965). The Jesuits may have also brought court robes, since they had commonly worn them during missions in China (Fairbank, Reischauer et al. 1973) (Blunden and Elvin 1983). Luxury textiles from China and elsewhere served importantly as presents given by Portuguese missionaries and traders to the daimyo and their retinues, various officials and politicians (Matsuda 1965).

Although little written documentation has been found of this early commerce, the Portuguese-Japan encounters have been recorded with amazing detail on painted screens believed by Japanese scholars to possess near photographic authenticity. The screens were labeled namban, a term referring to goods or persons from the southern seas, from whence it was believed the startling intruders came, since Southeast Asia was then for
most Japanese the furthermost reaches of the existing world. The Portuguese themselves were called "namban from India" (Okamoto 1972).

Approximately 60 namban screens exist in collections in Japan and elsewhere. Nanban screens were painted from around 1560 to 1640 with several attributed to renowned painters of the day whose life spans were documented. These paintings indicate that Portuguese traders had acquired fine silks in China, possibly including Court robes, which were retailed to contemporary European modes (Okamoto 1972; Yamane 1973). One may speculate that cutting up and recycling old Chinese court robes was among the earliest Japanese imitations of Western innovations.

In Kabuki dramas, much beloved entertainments of the Edo Period (1609-1868), the actor portraying a "foreigner" is commonly dressed and made-up as a Westerner in a Chinese dragon robe, a convention which continues to this day. It is possible that the concept of Westerners wearing Chinese court fabrics was simply a vagary of the artist on the screen paintings, copied by the actors, and later by wood-block portraits of the actors (Laforet Museum 1982). If this were the case, why would one element on the screens be a distortion when other details, provable by extant examples of Japanese costumes and architecture as well as drawings of Portuguese trading ships, were painted virtuously true to life (Okamoto 1972)?

In 1603, at the climax of the Portuguese era, the dancer Okuni founded Kabuki, which she first performed in the Kamo Riverbed (Shijogawara), a summertime stage for the nearby Gion district. Nanban paraphernalia were popular accessories of the day for both Japanese Christians and the entertainment district dandies who initiated fashion trends. Both Okuni and her lover/dance partner, Sanzaburo, have been portrayed wearing a Catholic rosary and cross (Shaver 1966; Gunji 1987). It seems to indicate that both dancers were at the very least aware and interested in the details of foreigner's wardrobes, and may have originated their ongoing Kabuki portrayals.

The persistent proselytizing of the daimyo and their subjects by the Portuguese missionaries eventually threatened the Tokugawa Shogun sufficiently that the Portuguese were totally expelled from Japan in 1639. The cross, commerce, and colonization were by then notorious traveling companions. Moreover, by this time the Japanese had learned sufficient skills of navigation and shipbuilding to pursue the profits of sea trade on their own. Dutch merchants, eager and willing to replace the Portuguese, were ready to acquiesce to all Japanese stipulations. The flexible Dutch were awarded the sole right to conduct foreign trade in Japan. The colony of Dutch traders had to accept not only supervision of all commerce by the

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1It is a possibility that at some time previous a Buddhist priest from the Asian Mainland brought a temple canopy made of a court robe into Japan since it was a practice to recycle gifts of Chinese robes and other textiles to religious purposes.
Shogun's government, but in addition accept being totally sequestered on the tiny island of Deshima in Nagasaki Harbor, where all other aspects of their lives could be controlled as well. From the middle of the 17th century onward numerous Chinese goods were brought to Nagasaki on an annual Dutch cargo ship (Niwa 1980) (Port Authority 1708-1712). Smaller licensed Chinese and Japanese ships also participated in the continuing silk trade conducted through Nagasaki.

However, it is probable that a significant number of court robes were imported along a third path, a "Northern Silk Route" which went through the lands of the Ainu. The curious label of "Ezo Kazari" (Ainu Decorations) appearing in the records of the Associations (Kajitani and Yoshida 1992) had startled me. Ezo is the old name for the northernmost of the Japanese Islands, Hokaido, and also for the Ainu, its indigenous people. My curiosity propelled me northward on a trail from Northern Honshu to Hokaido.

Sai Mura, a quiet coastal village near the tip of Northern Honshu, prior to the development of the current Hokaido- Aomori route, served as a lively port for Japanese merchant boats sailing to and from Hokaido (Ohtsuka 1993). The Sai Mura Port Historical Museum displayed examples of Chinese court garments and fragments discovered in that area, there traditionally designated "Ezo Nishiki" or "Ainu brocade". Evidently the robes were not yet being perceived as "decorations", though one early Qing robe had previously been paraded dressing a mannequin in their local festival (Tanaka 1992). In any case the robes were perceived as costumes linked to the Ainu people and worn by them.

Going farther north across the sea to the island of Hokaido were the Ainu had been driven centuries ago, I found myself in the port of Hakodate. In its Museum of History of Northern Peoples I found a gallery arrayed with fine examples of Ainu Robes in which two impressive early Qing Dynasty robes greeted me with yet a new designation, "Santan Nishiki" (Santan Brocade).

Santan was the old name for the area of coastal Siberia surrounding the Amur River and for its people, the Urichi tribes. Plentiful evidence indicated that both traditional and local variations on court robes had been worn in that area. The Santan people had a tributary relationship with China. Just southwards in the port of Dairen, the Qing government maintained a provincial office (Fairbank, Reischauer et al. 1973). There official meetings were held with the Santan tribespeople who brought down furs such as marten and wolf, highly sought after by the Chinese, to pay the tribute levied and to trade for silk. These encounters occasioned the Santan leaders' acquisition and wearing of court robes. In Santan (Urichi) families Chinese court robes are still worn for special occasions(Hokaido Shinbun-sha 1991).
Japanese merchants had traded along the coast of Hokaido for at least three hundred years with the Ainu who lived inland and to the North. These Hokaido Ainu, were known to intermittently make the courageous sail northward to their tribal cousins, the Ainu who dwell on the southern part of the island of Sakhalin. This long narrow island rests its northernmost tip close to the mouth of the Amur River on the Siberian mainland. Sakhalin Island Ainu and Santan people on the Asian mainland maintained a lively trade in furs and kelp used for medicine. The chieftains of the Sakhalin Ainu, who also served as shamans to their people, enjoyed wearing court robes and either received them as gifts or traded for them with the Santan tribespeople (Hokaido Shinbun-sha 1991; Ohtsuka 1993).

It may be speculated that many illegal or outdated robes were sent by the agents of the Manchu via the Northern river routes and seas because this was the least costly way to ship them. Moreover, in the early years of the Qing, while their assumption of rule in China was still shaky, shipment of robes through their ancestral homelands might have meant greater control over permanent disposal abroad. Outdated robes might also have been sent directly from the provincial office of Dairen around the Korean Peninsula to the midway Japanese island of Tsushima, and then on to Nagasaki. Korean ships, which were licensed to trade with Japan, docked at Tsushima bringing goods from Korea and China (Yoshida October).

The trade in court robes via the Hokaido route diminished significantly at the beginning of the 19th century. The highly profitable enjoyed freely by the Ainu eventually came to the attention of the local Japanese ruler, the Matsumae daimyo, who took over its control in 1809 as an official of the shogunate (Ohtsuka 1993). The robes were labeled Ezo Nishiki by Matsumae government officials, possibly with the intention of making them indigenous relics of Hokaido.

Continuing study of the trade routes, names listed as donors in the records, as well as scholarly access to the hangings themselves, should provide further traces of the full tale of their transmission from the palaces of Beijing to the festival carts of Kyoto.

CONCLUSIONS

Chinese court robes provided textiles well suited to the spectacle of the Gion Matsuri. Festival hangings were meant to alter the environment, create a distinct atmosphere of color, elegance, and excitement, sufficient to capture the attention and cooperation of the Japanese deities and instill hope and pride in the townspeople. The Chinese court robes fulfilled the criteria of luxury, rarity, visibility, and appropriateness of motif. Court robes were available over the centuries because the members of the Gion Matsuri Yamaboko Rengokai were consistently willing to donate funds to acquire and alter them. Robes originally acquired as gifts from Portuguese merchants and missionaries to those in power eventually entered the collections. The envy of the powerful daimyo who coveted the trade profits
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PROCESSION
of nearby weaker peoples, and who were able to take control of that trade, served to facilitate other court robes' importation during the the Exclusionary Period.

The court robes and their main featured motif, the dragon, traveled both horizontally and vertically as seas were crossed. The robes gained legitimacy and a new identity when they immigrated to Japan, becoming designated "local products" in at least two instances. Vertically, the social status of the dragon declined. Descending from the elevated heights of the imperial throne of China, he came to serve as an icon for a downtown merchant's parade, however noble its origins and extravagant its decorations. The tenacity of his image as a powerfully beneficent symbol made his capture, conversion, and display over the centuries a worthwhile effort for members of the Gion Festival Associations of Kyoto.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
The present research was conducted from 1990 to 1994. Four trips were made to Kyoto and one to Portugal. The 1994 study in Japan was supported by a Fellowship from the Japan Foundation. On two occasions, I was able to attend the festival and to photograph and videotape the procession and attendant rites. On other occasions I was privileged to gain entry to restricted research and storage facilities where I was able to examine several of the objects closely. This was done through the auspices of the Gion Matsuri Yamaboko Rengokai and with the constant collaboration and supervision of Professor Kojiro Yoshida, the member who serves as the Association's deputy in charge of the artwork collections.

The "Northern Silk Route" has been documented in recent years by Professor Ohtsuka of the Osaka Museum of Ethnology (Ohtsuka 1993) who was very generous with his guidance and time.

Most helpful of all in this textile study was a Japanese language survey of the collection published in 1992 co-authored by Professor Kojiro Yoshida and Nobuko Kajitani of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. My personal observation and research was inspired by and based on their pioneering work in describing, dating, organizing, and providing technical information about the objects (Kajitani and Yoshida 1992).

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