

Cranes, Dragons, and Teddy Bears

Japanese Children's Kimono from the Collection of Marita and David Paly

OCTOBER 22, 2016 - MARCH 26, 2017



PORTLAND ART MUSEUM, OREGON

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Throughout history and across the globe, children's clothing has consisted of smaller versions of adult garments. In Japan, from the tenth century until modern times, kimono were worn by men and women of all ages and all social stations. Children regularly wore hand-me-downs from their elders, of course, but families who could afford to do so would clothe their youngest in kimono specifically fashioned for small bodies,

often adorned with auspicious motifs: to wear cranes, dragons, or other emblems of immortality was to be literally wrapped in good wishes for health and long life.

Most of the kimono in this exhibition feature pictorial designs created through the use of *kasuri* or *tsutsugaki*, resist-dyeing techniques that were developed to very high levels of craftsmanship in Japan by the eighteenth century. Ceremonial

occasions called for more extravagant measures: eight garments in this group are *miyamairi* kimono, one-of-a-kind ceremonial wear made for a toddler's first visit to a Shinto shrine. These mimic the shape of formal adult kimono and feature family crests and pictorial designs created through a combination of *tsutsugaki* and hand-painting, or hand-painting alone.

Of special interest are the three boys' kimono with *omoshirogara*, "novelty designs" that came into vogue in the 1910s through 1930s. Dating from an era when Japan was rapidly modernizing, these robes are decorated with machine-printed images of modernity, such as airplanes and teddy bears.

Spanning from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, the kimono and banners in this exhibition evoke the magic of childhood in traditional Japan. The Museum is grateful to Marita and David Paly for so generously sharing their collection. David Paly was also an inexhaustible source of information about Japanese textiles and dyeing techniques.

Kimono Construction

The basic form of the Japanese kimono has changed little over time. Practical and versatile, it is a garment that celebrates the inherent beauty of cloth, uninterrupted by tailoring. An adult kimono is made from a single bolt of fabric, about 14 inches wide and 38 feet long, which is cut into seven straight pieces. Two long panels form the right and left half of the garment, each in a long strip of cloth that is draped over the shoulder. Two shorter panels form the sleeves, two more become the overlapping sections in the front of the garment, and a narrow strip forms the lapel and collar. Vertical seams are uncut, and the selvage edges are basted together with a long running stitch.



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The inevitable consequence of this system is that all adult kimono are the same width—about 26 inches. Differences in height are accommodated by folds tucked under the *obi* (sash), making it possible to shorten the garment by several inches. Differences in girth are usually ignored, although for a thin person the side seams can be taken in, but never trimmed. The kimono was never intended to be a close-fitting garment that revealed the contours of the body.

For children, however, various solutions must be found to make a garment of appropriate size. Kimono for toddlers sometimes use a single panel of cloth at the back or, when two panels are used, tucks might be taken at the yoke to make the shoulders narrower. If it is necessary to shorten the garment, a deep fold is sewn in at the waistline.

Fibers

Japanese clothing was historically made from three main fibers: *asa*, silk, and cotton. *Asa* is the generic Japanese term for bast fibers—fibers extracted from the inner bark of a wide family of trees, shrubs, and grasses, such as hemp, ramie, mulberry, and wisteria. Like linen, which was unknown in Japan, *asa* is slightly stiff and coarse. *Asa* has been in use since prehistoric times for making cloth, as it was the most readily available raw material. The highest quality *asa* is referred to as *jōfu*, “superior cloth,” a plain-weave fabric woven from thin, very fine bast fibers—usually from the ramie plant. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, several regions of Japan developed their own distinctive *jōfu* as luxury cloth for presentation to the domain lord or the shogun.

Silk was introduced to Japan from China, along with other technologies of continental culture, sometime between the sixth and seventh centuries. Spun from the cocoons of silkworms that feed on mulberry leaves, silk contains animal protein, which makes it vulnerable to damage from overexposure to sunlight. Otherwise silk threads are surprisingly strong and versatile. Silk takes dyes well and is comfortable against the skin, cool in summer, and warm in winter. For most of history, its high cost restricted its use to members of the court nobility or samurai warlords. During the Edo period (1615–1868), commoners were forbidden by law from wearing silk: it was thought that self-indulgence in luxury fabrics would undermine their morals!



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Cotton has a relatively short history in Japan. Native to tropical and semi-tropical climates such as India and Egypt, it first appeared in Japan during the fifteenth century, but it did not become widely available until the mid-eighteenth century. Indigo had been known in ancient times, but came into large-scale production with the rise of cotton. Indigo as a dye is unique in that it strengthens fibers; it also contains a natural insecticide, so indigo-dyed cotton trousers and jackets were eagerly adopted by farmers throughout the country. City dwellers took to indigo-dyed cotton kimono as a less expensive, warmer, and more comfortable alternative to *asa* garments.

Dyeing Techniques

Kasuri, from the verb *kasumu*, to grow hazy or blurry, is the Japanese term for a resist-dyeing technique that was introduced from Indonesia, where it is known as *ikat*. (Okinawa was likely an intermediary in this cultural transfer.) In this plain-weave cloth, patterns are created by binding and dyeing the yarns

before they are strung on the loom. Variants include resist-dyeing only the warp yarns, only the weft yarns, and double *ikat*, where both horizontal and vertical threads are resist-dyed. Japanese dyers excelled at creating pictorial designs (*e-gasuri*), which were popular for both adult and children's kimono.

Tsutsugaki, literally “pipe drawing,” is a resist-dyeing technique that offers far greater freedom than *kasuri*. Fabric is stretched on a frame, and the dyer draws designs freehand with a rice paste extruded from a conical tube (*tsutsu*). When the cloth is dipped into dye, the areas coated with paste are not affected. The process is repeated for every color used in the garment.

This exhibition was organized by the Portland Art Museum and curated by Maribeth Graybill, Ph.D., the Arlene and Harold Schnitzer Curator of Asian Art.



GLOSSARY

Akane: The Japanese word for madder, a herbaceous perennial plant. The roots are the source of a range of red pigments that have been used since prehistoric times to create vibrant, fast red dyes for cloth.

Asa: The generic Japanese word for bast fibers, such as ramie and hemp.

Beni: A red dye and pigment derived from *benibana*, the safflower plant; used in Japan from the late seventh or eighth century onward.

Boro: Patchwork or rags; from *boroboro*, “in tatters.”

Jōfu: “Superior cloth”; plain-weave fabric woven from thin, very fine bast fibers—usually from the ramie plant.

Kasuri: The Japanese term for *ikat*.

Ikat: The Indonesian term, now widely accepted in English-language scholarship, for plain-weave cloth with patterns created by resist-dyeing the yarns before they are strung on the loom.

Minogame: Tortoises wearing a straw raincoat (*mino*). In East Asian lore, tortoises are symbols of longevity. The *minogame* is a Japanese variant on this theme, in which the tortoise is so ancient that it has acquired a long cape or train of seaweed on its back.

Miyamairi: “Shrine pilgrimage”; in this context, an infant’s first visit to a Shinto shrine, where the parents will celebrate the birth and offer prayers for the child’s health and long life. Historically, this ritual took place between the 30th and 100th day after birth, but there were many regional differences in practice.

Omoshirogara: Novelty designs, referring to pictorial designs that became popular in Japan in the 1910s through 1930s.

Semamori: “Protection for the back”; a talismanic motif, usually in red, added at the back of the neck of a child’s kimono.

Shijira-ori: A special type of silk weave created by applying different tension to the warp and weft yarns, creating a puckered effect.

Shikon: Also known as *murasaki*; purple gromwell, a plant that has been cultivated in Japan since the eighth century as a dye and medicine.

Shōjō: A mythological sprite with a red face and hair, and a tendency to overindulge in alcohol.

Recommended Reading

Balfour-Paul, Jenny. *Indigo*. London: British Museum Press, 1988/2011.

Dalby, Liza Crikfield. *Kimono: Fashioning Culture*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1993.

Rathbun, William. *Beyond the Tanabata Bridge: Japanese Folk Textiles*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1993.

CHECKLIST

Kimono with *Kasuri* Designs

1. ***Shijira-ori* Boy's Kimono with Field Block Design and *Kasuri* Crosses**
Late 18th/early 19th century
Silk with double ikat designs in *beni*, indigo, and indigo-on-yellow; unlined
25 x 25 inches
2. **Padded Girl's Kimono with *Kasuri* Plaid Design**
19th century
Silk with single and double ikat designs in indigo and *shikon*; black silk lining
29 1/2 x 30 inches
3. ***Boro* Infant's Kimono**
19th century
Patchwork cotton with stripes and double ikat patterns in indigo and *shikon*; red cotton collar
24 1/2 x 24 inches
4. ***Miyamairi* Girl's Kimono with *Kasuri* Paulownia Leaves and Stylized Phoenixes**
19th century
Silk with single and double ikat designs in indigo and light gray; red silk thread embroidery *semamori* at neck; sleeves lined with red crepe silk
37 3/4 x 30 1/2 inches
5. **Boy's Kimono with *Kasuri* Dragons**
Probably Ōmi province (present-day Shiga Prefecture)
19th century
Jōfu (ramie) with ikat designs in indigo; unlined
37 x 24 inches

6. **Boy's Kimono with *Kasuri* Arrowheads**
Amami Ōshima, Kagoshima Prefecture
19th century
Silk with double ikat designs in indigo and iron mud dye; indigo cotton lining
30 x 34 inches
7. **Boy's Kimono with *Kasuri* Carp and Nets**
Late 19th/early 20th century
Asa with double ikat designs in indigo; *beni asa* lining at the yoke and lower back; sleeve ends trimmed with printed cotton piping
43 x 45 inches
8. **Girl's Kimono with *Kasuri* Tea Bowls, Vases, Chrysanthemums, and Bamboo**
Probably Echigo region (present-day Niigata Prefecture)
First quarter of 20th century
Jōfu with double ikat designs in indigo; appliquéd *semamori* patch at neck of resist- and tie-dyed crepe silk; unlined
35 1/2 x 29 inches
9. **Girl's Kimono with *Kasuri* Stripes and Squared Spirals**
Kurume, Fukuoka Prefecture
First half of 20th century
Cotton with single and double ikat designs in indigo; unlined
33 x 31 3/4 inches

Kimono with *Tsutsugaki* and Hand-painted Designs

10. **Padded *Miyamairi* Kimono with Family Crests and Longevity Motifs: Crane, *Minogame* Tortoises, Pines, Rocks, and Bamboo**
Tōhoku region (northern Japan)
19th century
Cotton with *tsutsugaki* and hand-painted designs in gray and black; cumin ground; *akane* (madder) cotton lining
39 1/2 x 35 1/4 inches
11. **Padded *Miyamairi* Boy's Kimono with Family Crests and Auspicious Motifs: Eagles, Pines, Peonies, Hat and Cape of Invisibility, Mallet, Treasure Bag, and Scroll**
Probably Tōhoku region (northern Japan)
19th century
Cotton with *tsutsugaki* and hand-painted designs in red, yellow, gray, and black; indigo ground; indigo cotton lining
41 x 39 1/2 inches
12. ***Miyamairi* Girl's Kimono with Family Crests and Auspicious Motifs: Mallets, Cloves, Hat and Cape of Invisibility, Key, Treasure Bags, and More**
19th century
Asa with *tsutsugaki* and hand-painted designs in *beni*, yellow, brown, and black; indigo ground; white *asa* lining; red silk lining at edges of sleeves
40 x 38 inches
13. ***Miyamairi* Kimono with Family Crests and Design of Rabbits and Waves**
19th century
Cotton with *tsutsugaki* and hand-painted designs in indigo and black; indigo-over-yellow ground; unlined
32 x 28 inches
14. ***Miyamairi* Boy's Kimono with Family Crests and Design of Birds of Prey and Waves**
19th century
Asa with *tsutsugaki* and hand-painted designs in indigo and black; pale yellow ground; unlined
38 1/4 x 43 inches
15. **Boy's Kimono with Family Crests and Scene of the Warrior Nitta Yoshisada Throwing His Sword into the Sea, after a design by Utagawa Kuniyoshi**
Mid-19th century
Cotton with *tsutsugaki* and hand-painted designs in indigo, *beni*, yellow, green, and black; persimmon ground; blue silk lining with hand-painted design of deer among grasses
43 x 39 1/2 inches
- 15a. Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1797–1861)
***Nitta Yoshisada Throwing His Sword into the Sea*, 1844**
Published by Ezakiya Tatsuzō
Color woodblock print triptych
13 7/8 x 28 5/8 inches
16. ***Miyamairi* Boy's Kimono with Family Crests and Design of Sea Bream and Waves**
19th century
Asa with *tsutsugaki* and hand-painted designs in indigo and black; deep yellow ground; unlined
36 x 37 inches





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17. **Miyamairi Girl's Kimono with Family Crests and Landscape of Itsukushima Shrine**
 19th century
Asa with hand-painted designs in indigo, light brown, and black; pale yellow ground; sleeves lined with crepe silk
 39 x 32 inches

Omoshirogara Kimono

18. **Boy's Padded Kimono with Design of Snowmen, Penguins, Sailors, and Japanese Flag**
 1910s
 Cotton with machine-printed *kasuri* designs; green cotton lining
 33 x 30 inches
19. **Boy's Kimono with Design of Trucks, Motorcycles, and Racing Cars**
 1920s/30s
 Cotton with machine-printed *kasuri* designs; indigo cotton lining
 29 x 28 ½ inches

20. **Boy's Kimono with Design of Teddy Bears, Ships, Planes, and Tanks**
 1930s
 Rayon with machine-printed designs; white rayon lining
 30 x 32 inches

Bathing Towel

21. **Bathing Towel with Design of Crane, Minogame Tortoise, Fan, Pine, Bamboo, and Plum Blossoms**
 19th/early 20th century
 Cotton with *tsutsugaki* designs in indigo and *beni*
 37 ½ x 25 ½ inches

Boy's Day Banners

22. **Boy's Day Banner with Family Crest and Design of Rabbits and Waves**
 19th century
 Cotton with *tsutsugaki* designs in indigo, *beni*, and black
 225 x 24 ½ inches

23. **Boy's Day Banner with Family Crest and Design of the Sprite Shōjō Dancing on a Jar of Saké**
 19th century
 Cotton with *tsutsugaki* designs in indigo, *beni*, brown, and black
 80 ¾ x 13 inches

24. **Boy's Day Banner in the Shape of a Carp**
 Second half of 19th century
Asa with *tsutsugaki* designs in indigo, *beni*, and yellow
 112 x 25 ¾ inches

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