



Important Cultural Property

Kosode (Garment with small wrist openings), Design of Mandarin Ducks and Waves on Black Figured Satin

Edo Period, 17th Century

(Collection of Tokyo National Museum)

A formal *kosode* garment featuring a design expressed with *kanoko shibori* and embroidery. Male and female mandarin ducks float in the water around the large wave patterns and take flight between them in a symbolic representation of harmonious marriage.

Photo: ColBase (<https://colbase.nich.go.jp/>)

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The garment features a design of waves making dramatic leaps in bow-like arcs against glossy figured satin¹ dyed jet black. Around them, embroidered mandarin ducks are depicted with beautiful coloration. In the early years of the Edo period, elegant and elaborate patterns that wrapped around the garments with embroidery, *kanoko shibori*,² and other techniques were most common. Toward the mid-17th century, however, *kosode* designs underwent a striking transformation. In 1620, Tokugawa Masako, a daughter of Hidetada (1579-1632), second shogun of the Tokugawa shogunate, was wedded to the Emperor Go-Mizunoo (1596-1680) at the Kyoto Imperial Palace. She was later called by the title “Tōfukumon-in.” She then placed orders for numerous *kosode* from Karigane-ya,³ a prominent Kyoto textile dealer. The garments she asked for were of entirely different designs than those of previous fashion styles in Kyoto. The patterns of flowers and birds of the four seasons are arranged in large size on the entire *kosode* like the composition of the painting. Then, by intendedly making a margin without patterns around the waist at the left side, and making the entire pattern arranged an arc, the *kosode* gained dynamic movement appearance. These innovative new designs came to be called

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The kimono is much more than a garment; it is a symbol of traditional Japanese culture. The kimono of contemporary Japan originated with the short-sleeved *kosode* in the Edo period (early 17th century to mid-late 19th century). Around this time, the *kosode* came to be worn by people from a wide range of generations, by everyone from court nobility and the samurai class to commoners, as an outer layer of clothing. The garments came to feature brilliant decorations with techniques including embroidery, *shibori* (shaped resist dyeing), and *katazome* (stencil resist dyeing). This article introduces one such *kosode* from the early Edo period (17th century), a time when the most revolutionary designs appeared.



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Kosode (Garment with small wrist openings), Design of Mandarin Ducks and Waves on Black Figured Satin (Detail)

Edo Period, 17th Century

Detailed *kanoko shibori* patterns dyed in red and indigo are used to represent the large waves. *Tatsu-nami* motifs depicting spray from the cresting waves are embroidered with gold thread, adding gorgeous, glittering accents to the design.

Photo: ColBase (<https://colbase.nich.go.jp/>)

Gosho-zome after the *Gosho* Imperial Palace where Tōfukumon-in lived, and they attained tremendous popularity throughout the city of Kyoto.

In 1666, *Shinsen Onhiinakata* (“A New Selection of Patterns”), the first *hinagatabon*⁴ work dedicated to *kosode* patterns, was published as a *hanpon*⁵ woodblock-printed book. The prevalence in this work of the sort of bold designs Tōfukumon-in preferred is evidence of just how celebrated the innovative, striking designs were. The inclusion of playful designs that hardly seem like they could be *kosode* patterns suggests that, as the style’s

popularity eventually spread among the townspeople, too, approaches showing freedom and resourceful wit also became more common in garment design.

A new look at the *kosode* here against the backdrop of the era’s fashion trends in fact reveals various playful touches in its design. In the wave design with its bold sense of motion, for instance, the waves are given sharply pointed triangular forms and are filled in with stitched patterns featuring *kanoko shibori* designs in red and indigo. While appearing to be waves, they can in

fact be seen to represent fishing nets drying on the shore. Moreover, careful inspection reveals green, leafy forms embroidered around the netting, spaced at certain intervals. Just what might this be meant to represent? That expresses pointy-tipped bamboo shoots sprouting up out of the ground. By combining these various patterns, like pairing the bamboo shoot motif, representing a wish for children’s thriving growth, with mandarin ducks, symbols of harmonious marital relations, this *kosode* had the meaning with auspicious significance.



Shinsen Onhiinakata (“A New Selection of Patterns”)

Edo period, 1667

(Collection of Tokyo National Museum)



Hinagatabon books with more than 200 *kosode* patterns were published in the Edo period, the very first in 1666. Apparently quite popular, a second edition of the work appeared the following year. (Photographs here show the second edition.)

1. *Rinzu*: A type of textile with damask patterns woven into it using raw silk for both the warp and weft threads. Scouring the fabric to remove impurities from it after weaving creates a smooth, glossy white appearance. The most commonly used silk fabric used for making high-quality *kosode* in the Edo period.
 2. A shaped resist dyeing technique featuring patterns of small, white dots like the spots on the back of a young deer, made by dyeing fabric with certain spots bound with thread.
 3. The family business into which Ogata Kōrin was born. See “The Beauty of Kimono,” September 2023.
 4. A book of patterns featuring selections of miniaturized sketches and designs. They also functioned as fashion books and order books.
 5. Books printed beginning in the early Edo period using woodblocks carved with text and illustrations.