Traditional New Year's Kimono: *Haregi* – Its Heritage and Modern Adaptations

Kimono, a traditional Japanese garment, holds special significance during New Year celebrations as *haregi* (formal clothing). We spoke with an expert in kimono studies to explore the history, traditions, and modern adaptations of this attire, particularly for women.

(Text: MOROHASHI Kumiko)

"In the past, Japanese people placed great emphasis on the kimono worn for New Year celebrations, to the extent of having new ones made specifically for the occasion. In Japan, special days such as New Year's and festivals are referred to as 'hare days,' (celebration days in Japanese) and the kimono worn on these days is called 'haregi.' These garments often feature traditional celebratory patterns (*kissho-moyo*)[1] created using techniques like yuzen-dyeing[2] or Japanese embroidery."

This explanation comes from OYAMA Yuzuruha, Chair of the Department of Decorative Arts at the Tokyo National Museum, an expert in the cultural history of Japanese and East Asian textiles, with a particular focus on early modern kimono.

Photo: ColBase

An example of a *furisode haregi*: Long-Sleeved Robe ("Furisode") with Clouds, Bamboo Curtains, and Tachibana Oranges (19th century, Tokyo National Museum collection).

Even today, it is traditional for unmarried women to wear the long-sleeved *furisode* kimono, which is considered proper etiquette, and among *haregi*, it is often the most elegant and intricately designed. The origin of the *furisode* dates back to the Edo period (from the early 17th century to the mid-late 19th century), with the longest sleeves reportedly measuring as much as one meter.

"For example, a 19th-century piece, *Long-Sleeved Robe ("Furisode") with Clouds, Bamboo Curtains, and 'Tachibana' Oranges* (see photo), is one of the representative examples of a *furisode* worn as *haregi*. The pattern features a courtly, elegant bamboo screen[3] swaying in the wind, with the tachibana (an evergreen tree symbolizing longevity) shown as a lucky motif using yuzen-dyeing and embroidery," explains OYAMA.

According to OYAMA, the origin of the *furisode* came from opening the sides of the kimono to allow for the addition of the long sleeves, known as 'furi,' which helped regulate the body heat of children, who are more prone to overheating. This practice began in the early 17th century and gradually became more widespread. By the end of the 17th century, the sleeves began to lengthen, and by the late 18th century, they reached about one meter in length.

"Even after the late 19th century, when Japan's modernization was fully underway, many women in Japan still wore kimonos more regularly than Western-style clothing. So, on occasions like New Year's, they would wear *haregi*, which lifted their spirits. During

Photo: ColBase

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From left:

Example of a *furisode haregi*: Long-Sleeved Kimono ("Furisode") with Peonies, Tachibana Oranges, and Nets (18th century, Tokyo National Museum collection). "In addition to the tachibana, which symbolizes eternal youth, the design also features peony flowers, a symbol of wealth and prosperity, creating a design full of happiness," says OYAMA.

Furisode with Blue Crepe Silk Ground, Floral Garden Landscape Pattern (20th century, Tokyo National Museum collection)

Example of a *tomesode* worn by married women: Robe ("Kosode") with a Paulownia Tree and Phoenixes (18th century, Tokyo National Museum collection).

the Taisho era (1912–1926), influenced by Western culture, *furisode* featuring vibrant synthetic dyes and Western-style patterns dyed using yuzen became popular. The example shown in the photo, Furisode with Blue Crepe Silk Ground, Floral Garden Landscape Pattern, features a landscape pattern of a flower field, almost like an oil painting, dyed with a vivid blue background. The kimono also bears a family crest, indicating that it was worn in formal settings (see photo)."

OYAMA explains that such vibrant, European-style landscape patterns would likely suit not only Japanese women but also women overseas. "For Japanese women, there is an awareness of the etiquette that *furisode* should only be worn by young women before marriage. However, for those who are not Japanese, I believe there's no need to adhere to that custom. *Furisode* often features more splendid and beautiful patterns than the *tomesode*[4], which married women wear, so I especially recommend them to women from overseas.

"Recently, there has been a movement in Japan to incorporate kimono more freely into daily life and to experiment with new styles. For example, YOSHIKIMONO, a line of kimono designed by artist YOSHIKI (leader of the rock band X JAPAN), offers kimono styles that can be easily worn by women overseas. The YOSHIKIMONO can be worn like a dress by reversing the front and back, making it suitable for both Western-style parties and formal ceremonies with ethnic dress codes, offering a modern take on traditional attire."

"In Japan, the tradition of buying new *haregi* for the New Year held cultural significance, representing a fresh and positive start to the year. While these traditional customs are gradually fading in modern times, it is essential to preserve the spirit and sentiments of the past regarding the New Year. At the same time, by embracing innovative kimono designs, we can celebrate the New Year with both elegance and freedom."

Photo: YOSHIKIMONO 2020 S/S COLLECTION

A modern adaptation of kimono, an example of YOSHIKIMONO. This kimono can be worn both as a traditional garment and as a dress by reversing the front and back, creating a Western-style look.

1. Patterns considered lucky, symbolizing prosperity and longevity. Examples include tachibana, cranes, turtles, wisteria, and fans.
2. A technique for dyeing kimono that represents Japan. It was perfected by Miyazaki Yuzen, who is said to have been active from the latter half of the 17th century to the 18th century. His fan paintings became popular, and the kimono patterns inspired by his artistic style spread widely during that period. See *"Furisode" (Kimono with Long Sleeves) Plum Trees, Standing Screens, and Falcon Design on Whity Brown Chirimen Crepe Ground* in the June 2023 issue of *HIGHLIGHTING Japan*.
3. A bamboo screen used in temples or noble residences.
4. Refers to the kimono with shorter sleeves worn by married women, in contrast to the *furisode*. Nowadays, it is often worn as formal attire for married women.