



Formal Outer Kimono ("Uchikake") with Bamboo Curtains, "Kusudama", and Cherry Blossoms

An *uchikake* likely worn by a young woman who had married into a wealthy merchant family. Embroidery and Japanese *shibori* tie-dyeing techniques create a gorgeous pattern representing the *Tango no Sekku* festivities associated with Japan's Imperial Court.

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

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What vibrant colors! Dyed with safflower, a luxury dye in the Edo period known as *benibana-zome*, this *uchikake* is a *kosode* robe that would have been worn over the kimono beneath. The robe features thick cotton padding at the edge to make it easier for the hem to drag. The glossy *rinzu* silk satin damask fabric features a woven ground pattern of a crane, a symbol of longevity and good fortune, flying across the sky. The design is further decorated with cherry blossoms in full bloom among the clouds and *misu* bamboo blinds swaying in the wind.

Fluttering in the wind alongside the *misu* are *kusudama*, ornamental scented balls made of musk, agarwood, and clove wrapped in silk. The ornaments are covered with stylized flowers made to look like *satsuki* azaleas and *tachibana* orange blossoms, with irises, *mugwort*, and five-colored tassels² hanging below. On May 5, the day of the *Tango no Sekku*³ ceremony, *kusudama* were hung on *misu* blinds throughout the Imperial Court to pray for peace and harmony, and left on display until *Choyo no Sekku* on September 9. Ornamental motifs like these, representing the situations from annual events at the Imperial Court, were in fashion among townswomen, who adored the courtly life. Incorporating seasonal motifs into a single painting-like design, as this *uchikake* does, is a unique characteristic of Japanese kimono.

A variety of traditional Japanese

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The kimono is more than a garment; it is a symbol of traditional Japanese culture. The kimono of contemporary Japan originated with the *kosode* (a garment with small wrist openings) of the Edo period (early 17th century to mid-late 19th century). This issue introduces a selection from the Tokyo National Museum collection of *kosode*, the everyday dress of people of all classes during the Edo period.

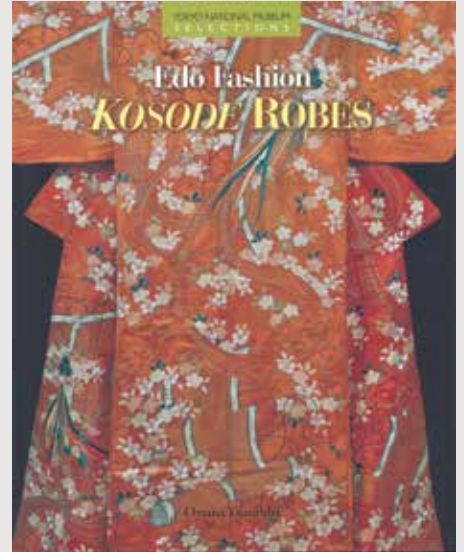


Safflower was used to create premium *benibana-zome* dye.

Photo: PIXTA

Formal Outer Kimono ("Uchikake") with Bamboo Curtains, "Kusudama", and Cherry Blossoms (Back)

Each small white dot is individually tied before the fabric is dyed in a process called *kanoko shibori*. This method, which became popular in the early Edo period, is known as *Kyo kanoko*. Embroidery in gold and silk thread add dimension to the pictorial pattern of the design.



Oyama Yuzuruha, *Tokyo National Museum Selections: Edo Fashion—Kosode Robes*, 2020, Tokyo National Museum

This book shows 54 of the over 300 Edo-period *kosode* robes in the Tokyo National Museum collection and introduces changing fashion trends from the times.

techniques were in fact used to decorate kimono in the Edo period. In addition to *kanoko shibori* tie-dyeing (see photo of back view), this *uchikake* also employs *washishu* Japanese embroidery, which saw dramatic advances in the Edo period. *Washishu* is most notable for its use of silk embroidery floss with very little twist, dyed in such colors as *hiwa-iro* (light olive yellow), *moegi-iro* (light green), and *beni-iro* (red).⁴ Stitches covering large areas of fabric are used to create patterns with dimension and texture. This technique gives the embroidery floss a jewel-like shimmer, highlighting the luster of the silk thread to great effect. Strands of gold embroidery floss—made by wrapping thinly cut strips of gilded *washi* Japanese paper around a core of silk thread to form a cord—are

individually stitched in place to create the pattern. This ingenious technique brings a golden glow to textiles that dyes cannot.

While the *uchikake* is very splendid in design, its short sleeve length indicates that it was worn by a married woman, as opposed to the *furisode* (long-sleeved kimono), which was

made for young, unmarried women. This robe was likely worn on formal occasions by the young wife of a prosperous city merchant. Having gained economic power in the Edo period, the merchant class proudly wore kimono that were more extravagant and lavish than those of high-ranking samurai or ladies of the court.

The Art of Fashion
Japanese Gallery (Honkan), Room 10
Tokyo National Museum

Formal Outer Kimono ("Uchikake") with Bamboo Curtains, "Kusudama", and Cherry Blossoms is on display until June 18, 2023. It has not been planned when this work will be exhibited next.

Ueno Park 13-9, Taito-ku, Tokyo

Opening Hours: 9:30 am - 5:00 pm

*Last admission 30 minutes before closing

Closed: Mondays (open on public holidays and closed the following day), New Year's holidays, intermittently as required

<https://www.tnm.jp/>

- Thin strips of split bamboo or reeds woven together with thread into a blind-like curtain called *sudare*, which are hung in front of house doors and windows. They function as sunshades or screens, while still allowing the wind to pass through. The high-end version of *sudare* edged in cloth is called a *misu*.
- Five tassel colors: blue, yellow, red, white, and black
- Sekku* refers to the day of the year on which the seasons change. The five *sekku* seasonal festivals that had been held since ancient times at the Imperial Court to ward off evil spirits have been taken up the general public, as well. *Tango no Sekku* is now generally marked as a day to pray for children to grow up healthy. *Choyo no Sekku* is also called *Kiku no Sekku* (Chrysanthemum Festival) and is marked by praying for good health and long life and a cup of sake topped with floating chrysanthemum petals.
- These are all traditional Japanese colors. *Moegi* is a bright green, the color of young leaves in early spring. *Hiwa-iro* is even brighter with stronger yellow tones, while *beni-iro* is a yellowish red.