



Nuihaku (Noh Costume)-Design of Lily and Court-Cow-Cartage Patterns of Brown Fabric

Azuchi-Momoyama period, 16th century (Collection of the Tokyo National Museum)

Kosode of the Azuchi-Momoyama period differ from modern kimono in having narrower sleeves and greater widths. Those featuring patterns created with embroidery and gold leaf are called *nuihaku*, and these were worn by women from high-ranking samurai families of the period, as well as being used as *noh* costumes for female characters.

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

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Compared to the shape of the modern kimono, this *kosode* features narrower sleeves and a shorter length. This is a form of *kosode* characteristic of the late Muromachi to early Edo periods (c. 1467-1700). During this time, people wore kimono in a loose fashion with lengths matching their body heights, leaving arms bare from elbows to fingertips. Narrow obi sashes about 5 cm in width fastened their kimono, as is depicted in genre paintings of the time.

Lily blooms extend from the hem to the shoulders, making for a grand lateral expansion. Around the lilies appear a number of *Gosho-guruma*, wheeled carriages for the use of court nobility, a quite unique design presenting a peculiar balance with such miniscule depictions of the carriages that they appear as if they might be suited for dwarves in contrast with the grand scale of the lilies. The *Gosho-guruma* is a type of carriage that was used to transport members of the noble class during the Heian period (c. 794 to the late 12th century), originally drawn by oxen, and was known by the name *gishsha*, literally “oxcart.” By the final years of the Kamakura period (late 12th century-1333), however, it had fallen out of use, after which it took on the appellation *Gosho-guruma*

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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). Originally worn as an undergarment by the noble class before the advent of the Edo period, the *kosode* came to be worn as an outer layer of clothing in the latter half of the 16th century – from around the late Muromachi period into the Azuchi-Momoyama period.¹ The garments then came to be beautifully decorated with techniques including embroidery and *shibori*.² This article introduces a *kosode* from the Azuchi-Momoyama period decorated with a technique called *nuihaku*, which is used to create designs with embroidery and gold leaf.



Nuihaku (Noh Costume)-Design of Lily and Court-Cow-Cartage Patterns of Brown Fabric (detail)

Azuchi-Momoyama period, 16th century (Collection of the Tokyo National Museum)

A section depicting courtly carriages features elaborate embroidery. The introduction of strong, twisted threads brings out textures with a greater sense of three-dimensionality in the carriages' *misu*⁵ blinds and cords fastened to them.



Iwasa Matabei's *Rakuchu Rakugai Zu (Funaki-bon)* ("The area in and around the Kyoto city," Funaki-version)

Edo period, 17th century (Collection of the Tokyo National Museum)

Women walk through the streets of Kyoto wearing narrow-sleeved *kosode* fastened with slender *obi* sashes. Kimono with such forms were still worn in the early Edo period, around the early 17th century.

kimono are symbolic representations of the lives of elegant refinement led by such nobility of the imperial court.

The designs here have, in fact, all been produced with traditional Japanese embroidery techniques. Japanese embroidery is characterized by the way it highlights the luster of the silk threads, creating embroidered designs with virtually untwisted silk threads. The lily pattern here provides a shining example of these special characteristics of Japanese embroidery, with the white and yellow color tone of the lilies exhibiting a brilliant radiance. The carriage patterns, meanwhile, display a fairytale-like beauty, with each individual carriage depicted with a variety of different flora of the four seasons, embroidered with fine detail. At the same time, the realistic expression in which the cords fastened to the carriages are repre-

sented reveals another aspect of Japanese embroidery with the astonishing level of technical skill it entails.

In the background of the embroidery is a *tatewaku* pattern³ with delicate *katagami* (stencil-like "pattern paper") patterns expressed with gold leaf, though in its current state, this has been rubbed away so that only faint traces of it slip in and out of view on the garment. The method of using a small knife to carve intricate patterns and stencil-like *katagami* to express them in gold leaf is another unique Japanese technique developed during the Azuchi-Momoyama period. This superb example of a *nuihaku* garment, produced with masterful use of embroidery and *katagami* stenciling techniques of the time, was used by the Konparu School⁴ of Nara, the longest-established *noh**gaku* theater troupe, and has been handed down and preserved to the present day.

("imperial carriage") as its use was then restricted to transporting members of the imperial household who lived in the *Gosho* (Imperial Palace) on special occasions. The patterns on this

Honkan Room 9, Tokyo National Museum

"Highlights of Japanese Art: Noh and Kabuki – *Nuihaku* Robes: A Japanese Aesthetic of Silk and Gold"

Nuihaku (Noh Costume)-Design of Lily and Court-Cow-Cartage Patterns of Brown Fabric will be exhibited from August 8 through October 1, 2023.

1. The Muromachi period, broadly defined, corresponds to the years 1336 to 1573, when members of the Ashikaga clan served as shoguns at the highest level of the samurai government. Muromachi here is derived from a place name, the district in Kyoto where the mansion serving as the headquarters of Ashikaga Yoshimitsu, the third shogun of the Ashikaga shogunate, was located. Likewise, the Azuchi-Momoyama period was the period when Oda Nobunaga assumed control of the samurai government, followed by Toyotomi Hideyoshi; among various interpretations, one is that this indicates the years from 1573 to the beginning of the 17th century. Azuchi is derived from the name of Nobunaga's castle residence, and Momoyama from Hideyoshi's.
2. A tie-dyeing technique that involves methods like tying fabric with thread or securing it with implements and using resist-dyeing techniques to then color sections of it with dyes.
3. Patterns consisting of series of wavy, curvilinear stripes that resemble steam rising from boiling water, considered auspicious and representative of the way spiritual auras might rise. It was especially favored by court nobility.
4. The *noh**gaku* theater school with the longest history. *Noh**gaku* is a classical Japanese performing art consisting of *noh*—a theatrical form involving song and dance that reached its peak of development around the 14th century—and *kyogen*—a dialogue-based form of comic theater. *Noh**gaku* was designated an Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO in 2008.
5. Curtain-like blinds consisting of rows of thinly split bamboo or reeds woven together with string are ordinarily called *sudare*. These are commonly hung in places like the entrances to residences, providing shade from the sun and conceal house interiors from view while letting the breeze pass through. High-grade *sudare* with fabric hems are known as *misu*.