

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

Textile Society of America Symposium  
Proceedings

Textile Society of America

---

9-2012

## The Use of Imported Persian and Indian Textiles in Early Modern Japan

Yumiko Kamada

Waseda Institute, yumiko-kamada@est.hi-ho.ne.jp

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tsaconf>

---

Kamada, Yumiko, "The Use of Imported Persian and Indian Textiles in Early Modern Japan" (2012). *Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings*. 701.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tsaconf/701>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Textile Society of America at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

## The Use of Imported Persian and Indian Textiles in Early Modern Japan

Yumiko Kamada

[yumiko-kamada@est.hi-ho.ne.jp](mailto:yumiko-kamada@est.hi-ho.ne.jp)

### Introduction

At the beginning of *Essai sur le Don*, Marcel Mauss cites phrases from the Edda, an important source of Norse mythology, which advises people to send weapons and clothes as gifts to friends to maintain their good relations.<sup>1</sup> The importance of clothes and textiles in social life and their powerful function as gifts seems to be universal. From early times, carpets and textiles woven in Turkey, Egypt, Iran and India were brought to Europe not just as trade goods, but also as diplomatic gifts, and their technical and aesthetic excellence was widely acknowledged by contemporary Westerners. However, these textiles were not just admired in the West. In the East, Japan was another destination for these exotic goods. While this topic has not been well studied, it is known that as early as in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, a handful of people, such as war lords and high priests valued imported Persian textiles and carpets.<sup>2</sup> In spite of Japan's seclusion policy in the Edo period, people admired imported Indian textiles and enjoyed using them.<sup>3</sup> This paper will aim to analyze how and in what social and cultural contexts Japanese people of the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries used imported textiles from Persia and India. First, I will introduce examples of clothing which use Persian and Indian textiles. This will be followed by an overview of how Persian and Indian textiles were incorporated into the tea ceremony. Lastly, I will briefly mention the popularization of Indian textiles in the late Edo period. Since the use of imported Indian and Persian carpets in Japan in association with Shinto festivals has been discussed elsewhere,<sup>4</sup> carpets are not dealt with in this paper.

### Imported Persian and Indian Textiles as Material for Clothing

The Kōdaiji-temple in Kyoto owns a coat made from a 16<sup>th</sup>-century Persian silk tapestry (Figure 1). This famous coat is said to have been used by Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537-1598), a powerful general of the Azuchi-Momoyama period (1568-1600) in Japan. Among several Persian carpets of this type, the carpet

---

<sup>1</sup> Mauss, Marcel. *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, translated by W.D. Halls, Routledge, London, 1990, pp. 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> For Persian woven textiles brought to Japan, see Gotoh (2001). Professor Katsuhiko Abe at Kanagawa University is preparing his doctoral dissertation entitled "Les Textiles Safavides et Mogholes dans les Collections Japonaise" which he will submit to the University of Paris in 2013. For carpets imported to Japan, see Sugimura (1994).

<sup>3</sup> For Indian cotton textiles brought to Japan, see Gotoh (2008) and Ogasawara (2005).

<sup>4</sup> See Kamada (2011a).

in the Thyssen-Bornemisza collection is the most closely related example.<sup>5</sup> Both of them have the design of a lion's head and lion hunting scenes in cartouches. The belligerent design of this Persian carpet, which was most probably presented by the Portuguese as gift, must have pleased Hideyoshi who had been at the pinnacle of his power as regent (*kampaku*) since 1585 after many long years of war. From the 1540s, the Portuguese had been traveling to Japan for trade and missionary purposes, until 1639 when they were expelled. The Portuguese were the first Westerners to trade with the Japanese and the latter's interest in former's way of life was reflected in the minute depiction of their clothes and belongings in screen paintings of *Namban* ("southern barbarians"). During that time, the textiles and goods imported by the Portuguese were highly valued. According to a Jesuit missionary, Luis Frois (1532-1597) who stayed in Japan from 1563-1597, Hideyoshi's predecessor, Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582) asked Luis Frois to show him European brocaded clothes.<sup>6</sup> During the Azuchi-Momoyama period, powerful warlords made imported textiles into clothes to show them off, and these imported textiles functioned as a status symbol.



**Figure 1, left. The coat of Toyotomi Hideyoshi, Kōdaiji Temple. (Sugimura, 1994, p. 147.)**

**Figure 2, right. The coat of Yamaga Sokō, Matsura Historical Museum. (Gotoh, 2008, pp. 138-139.)**

The Japanese also valued imported Indian cotton and other textiles, similar to Europeans who were fascinated by them. Yamaga Sokō (1622-1685), a famous Confucian scholar of the Edo period, was said

<sup>5</sup> This comparison was first made by May Beattie. See Beattie, May. *The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection of Oriental Rugs*, Switzerland, 1972, pp. 31-37.

<sup>6</sup> Kawasaki, Momota. *Frois no mita Sengoku Nihon* [Japan observed by Louis Frois], Tokyo, 2011, p. 50.

to have worn a coat made of 17<sup>th</sup>-century Indian painted cotton textile (Figure 2).<sup>7</sup> This type of Indian textile with zigzag design, which was a typical example made for the Southeast Asian market, was popular in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century and occasionally depicted in Japanese screen paintings as a fabric used for kimono.<sup>8</sup> This coat is still preserved in the Matsura Historical Museum at Hirado in Nagasaki prefecture where a factory of the Dutch East India Company was established in 1609 until it was moved to Deshima in 1641. Given that Yamaga Sokō had a good relationship with the 4<sup>th</sup> Lord of Hirado, Matsura Shigenobu (1622-1703), this Indian printed cotton textile might have been a gift from the Lord to Yamaga Sokō. Due to its rarity, desirability and monetary value, this minutely hand-painted Indian textile with vivid color and design must have been regarded as an appropriate gift for a respected scholar.

Admiration of these textiles continued for some considerable time. A coat owned by the 14<sup>th</sup> Lord of Kaga, Maeda Yoshiyasu (1830-1874) effectively uses Indian painted cotton textile in its design.<sup>9</sup> While this coat was tailored in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Indian cotton textile itself was probably made in the 18<sup>th</sup> century or earlier. The Maeda family, one of the dominant feudal families, is famous for their collection of imported Chinese, Persian and Indian textiles which are now preserved in the Kyoto National Museum. Among them is an Indian painted cotton textile of a landscape with lions, snakes, and plants, highlighted in gold pigment. This textile is said to have been purchased by the third Lord of Kaga, Maeda Toshitsune (1594-1658) in 1637 in Nagasaki where the Dutch and the Chinese were allowed to stay for trade.<sup>10</sup>

Not only feudal lords but also high priests were attracted to imported textiles. The robe, worn by Kōgetsu Sōgan (1574-1643) a prominent Zen monk of Daitoku-ji temple in Kyoto, uses fragments of imported Persian textile of palmette and leaf design (Figure 3).<sup>11</sup> While there was a tradition of using highly valued imported Chinese textile for the robes of prominent Buddhist monks, so far, this robe is the only known example that uses Persian textile. One possible reason for Sōgan's use of fragments of Persian textiles is that his father, Tsuda Sōgyū (?-1591) was a wealthy merchant of Sakai who would have had access to such goods. Tsuda Sōgyū was also a famous tea master, as was Kōgetsu Sōgan, and the tea ceremony is another important context in which imported textiles were used.

---

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed description, see Ogasawara (2005), p. 143 and Gotoh (2008), pp. 138-139.

<sup>8</sup> Ogasawara (2005), pp. 138-144.

<sup>9</sup> For an image of this coat, see Gotoh (2008), pp. 140-141.

<sup>10</sup> For this textile, see *ibid.*, pp. 130-131.

<sup>11</sup> Kyoto (1985), pp. 24, 74, and for Sōgan's portrait, see p. 70.





*Figure 3, left. The robe of Kōgetsu Sōgan, Daitokuji-temple. (Kyoto, 1985, p. 24.)*

*Figure 4, right. Sash, Persia or India, 17<sup>th</sup> century, Tokugawa Art Museum.*

## For the Tea Ceremony

The tea ceremony, which was established by Sen Rikyū (1522-1591) in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, was not merely an occasion for drinking tea.<sup>12</sup> It was a special setting to appreciate the accompanying paraphernalia. For instance, imported Chinese textiles were used as covers of famous tea vessels or in the decoration of hanging scrolls.<sup>13</sup> From a historical point of view, the tea ceremony was a politically embedded ceremony because it was first developed among warlords in the 16<sup>th</sup> century as a means to establish amicable relations among them.<sup>14</sup> Then, at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, wealthy merchants also began to practice the tea ceremony. Gradually, during the Edo period, the merchant class in general began to enjoy it also.<sup>15</sup> As the tea ceremony developed, knowledge of the ceremony and its utensils was accumulated; for instance, in 1798, the 7<sup>th</sup> Lord of Matsue, Matsudaira Fumai (1751-1818) published a book entitled *Kokon Meibutsu Ruijyū* [collection of historically famous objects] which

<sup>12</sup> For the Japanese tea ceremony, see Varley, Paul and Isao Kumakura eds. *Tea in Japan: Essays on the History of Chanoyu*, Honolulu, 1994.

<sup>13</sup> Gotoh (2001), pp. 51-61.

<sup>14</sup> Tanihata, Akio. *Chanoyu no Bunkashi* (Cultural History of the Tea Ceremony), Tokyo, 2005, pp. 10-29.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

covers famous tea utensils and classifies the types of textiles, that were used for the tea ceremony. For instance, Persian and Indian striped-design sashes, such as one in the Tokugawa Art Museum (Figure 4)<sup>16</sup> and one in Kyoto National Museum, which was once owned by the Maeda family (Figure 5), were made into covers for tea caddies.<sup>17</sup> Such textiles from Persia and India must have been very popular because a cover for a tea caddy in the Gotoh Museum (Figure 6), which is known as “*Mōru*”<sup>18</sup> and is dated to the 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> century, was of not Indian origin but probably produced in East Asia in imitation of Indian or Persian striped textiles.



**Figure 5, left. Textile, Persia or India, 17<sup>th</sup> century, Kyoto National Museum. (Kyoto, 1979, vol. 2, p. 147.)**

**Figure 6, right. Textile, China (?), 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century, The Gotoh Museum. (Gotoh, 2001, p. 124.)**

Other types of Persian and Indian textiles such as those with flower design were also valued and used in the context of the tea ceremony. For instance, Yōmei Bunko in Kyoto, the collection of the aristocratic Konoe family, owns textiles with flower design from 17<sup>th</sup>-century Persia or India (Figure 7)<sup>19</sup> that are believed to have been collected by Konoe Iehiro (1667-1736), who was renowned for his substantial knowledge of the tea ceremony. According to the early 18<sup>th</sup> -century record about him entitled *Kaiki*, he

<sup>16</sup> See Gotoh (2001), p. 122. For depictions of striped sashes dated to around 1635, see Beach, Milo and Ebba Koch, *King of the World: The Padshahnama*, London, 1997, p. 44.

<sup>17</sup> From the image in Kirihata (1994), p. 84, it can be observed that this textile uses metal-wrapped thread (S-direction).

<sup>18</sup> The term “*Mōru*” probably derived from “Mughal.”

<sup>19</sup> This textile also uses metal-wrapped thread (S-direction). See *Cha no Kireji Nyūmon* [Introduction to Textiles used for the Tea Ceremony], edited by Tankō-sha, Kyoto, 1996, pp. 61-62.



used not only Chinese, but also Persian and Indian textiles for the tea ceremony.<sup>20</sup> In fact, the shape of fragments of a Persian or Indian textile with vine scroll design clearly indicates that this textile was once used as a cover for a tea caddy.<sup>21</sup>



*Figure 7, left. Textile, Persia or India, 17<sup>th</sup> century, Yōmei Bunko (Tokyo, 2008, p. 142.)*

*Figure 8, right. Textile (bottom left), Persia or India, 17<sup>th</sup> century, Private collection. (Gotoh, 2001, p. 181.)*

During the Edo period, albums of fragments of textiles, known as “*kire tekagami*” were made for the purpose not only of enjoyment, but also to learn the classifications and types of textile with the help of the small name tags pasted next to each textile.<sup>22</sup> Persian and Indian textiles were included alongside Chinese and Japanese textiles that had historic and aesthetic value. Even tiny remnants were treasured and pasted into albums with a caption reading “*Mōru*” meaning India or “*Harusia*” meaning Persia.

An undated album, formerly in the Kanebo Collection, contains a fragment of a textile with two types of flowers arranged in rows between stripes. This textile, woven in Persia or India, was labeled, “*Mōru*.”<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, Yōmei Bunko owns a fragment of a closely related piece.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, a tiny fragment of a very similar textile (Figure 8) is pasted into another album once owned by a famous businessman and

<sup>20</sup> According to Tokyo (2008), p. 258, *Mōru* textiles were used for tea ceremony during 1727-1733; however, the precise provenance of these textiles is still unknown.

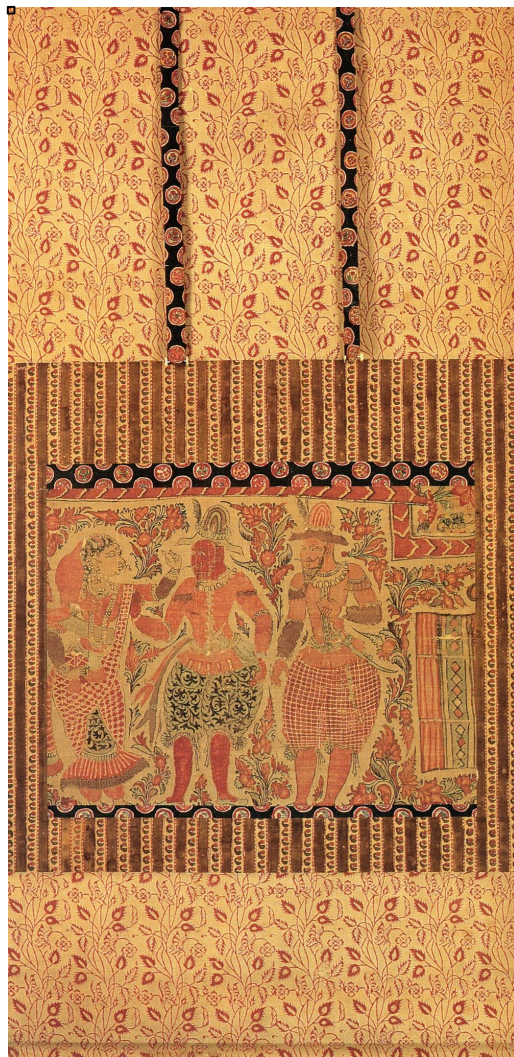
<sup>21</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 142, pl. 149, bottom left.

<sup>22</sup> For instance, see Gotoh (2001), pp. 130-169.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191, Figure 188-5, bottom right. The shape of this fragment indicates that this imported Persian or Indian textile had been made into a cover of a tea caddy before it was unstitched and pasted into this album.

<sup>24</sup> Tokyo (2008), p. 142, pl. 149, top right.

tea master, Masuda Donnō (1848-1938).<sup>25</sup> Most probably these fragments were originally from a single textile, and the care with which they have been preserved tells us how highly the Japanese valued them. In addition to having a renowned provenance, the use of such textiles in a cultural setting such as that of the tea ceremony further increased their value.



*Figure 9. Hanging scroll, Kobe City Museum. (Kobe, 1994, p. 17.)*

From the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, a new type of tea known as *sencha* became popular.<sup>26</sup> When the *sencha* tea ceremony came into fashion, rather than complicatedly woven textiles from Persia and India, painted and printed textiles from India were preferred as covers for tea utensils. Indian painted textiles were also occasionally made into hanging scrolls. For instance, an example in Kobe City Museum (Figure 9) and

<sup>25</sup> Gotoh (2001), p. 181, Figure 183-15, bottom left. For the life of Masuda Donnō and his involvement in tea, see Guth, Christine. *Art, Tea, and Industry: Masuda Takashi and the Mitsui Circle*, Princeton, 1993.

<sup>26</sup> For *sencha*, see Graham, Patricia J. *Tea of the Sages: The Art of Sencha*, Honolulu, 1998.



another example in a private collection feature a part of an Indian painted textile with figural design at the center.<sup>27</sup> This kind of painted textile depicting Indians and Westerners wearing hats and trousers was popular in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, and related pieces are stored in several museums in England and the United States. Other parts of this hanging scrolls are also decorated with Indian textiles of different designs. These examples indicate how highly these hand-painted Indian textiles were admired by the Japanese and how creatively they were accepted in their own cultural settings.



*Figure 10. Cigarette case, Tobacco and Salt Museum .(Tobacco, 2005, p. 180.)*

### **Use of Imported Indian Textiles in the Late Edo Period**

Gradually, Indian textiles became accessible to the wider population. From the late Edo period, the well-to-do used Indian painted and printed textiles to decorate many of their belongings. For instance, luxury cigarette cases were often decorated with Indian cotton textile (Figure 10). Such discrete use of highly valued Indian textiles for items such as tiny cigarette cases can be explained by the existence of Japan's seclusion policy, because of which the amount of imported textiles was limited, and the sumptuary law prohibited people from wearing fine clothes. Also, people at that time regarded it as sophisticated to use a luxurious material in an out-of-sight place. Interestingly, a closely related textile is known to have been used as a cover for a box of tea utensils by the feudal lord of the Hikone family and is still preserved in Hikone castle today.<sup>28</sup> A fragment of the same textile was pasted onto one of 450 separate boards of Indian textiles that were collected by this family and is currently preserved in the

<sup>27</sup> See Kobe (1994), p. 17 and Gotoh (2008), pp. 192-193.

<sup>28</sup> Gotoh (2008), p. 174, Figure 65.

Tokyo National Museum.<sup>29</sup> Admiration of Indian textiles was such that they were also used in a religious context. For instance, a mid 18<sup>th</sup>-century Indian embroidery was made into a decoration for the festival float for the Kyoto Gion Festival.<sup>30</sup>

□



*Figure 11, left. Pouch, Private collection, (Kumagai, 2009, p. 10.)*

*Figure 12, right. Under-kimono, Matsuzakaya collection.*

As a consequence of the admiration of Indian painted and printed cotton textiles in Japan, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Japanese imitations of Indian textiles became common, and several instruction manuals were published in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>31</sup> Small bags in a private collection are made from later examples of such textiles produced in Japan (Figure 11). Nevertheless, since they could not reproduce the vivid colors so characteristic of Indian printed and painted textiles, the real Indian textiles seem to have been more popular than the Japanese imitations.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31, Figure 1-72.

<sup>30</sup> For a detailed discussion of this embroidery and related pieces, see Kamada (2011b).

<sup>31</sup> Kumagai (2009), pp. 9-10.

While common people enjoyed using Japanese imitations of Indian chintz, some well-to-do individuals made extravagant use of Indian textiles for underwear. For instance, an under-kimono of around 1800 owned by Matsuzakaya was made out of an 18<sup>th</sup> -century large painted Indian textile with design of bamboo and flowers at the center (Figure 12).<sup>32</sup> While the impressive design of the bamboo dominates this under-kimono, the floral-painted borders of this Indian textile are cleverly placed in areas of the sleeves and bottom. Probably, the overall design of this Indian textile was intended for the Japanese market.

### **Differences and Similarities**

From the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, many Europeans and Japanese were fascinated by Indian textiles. While imitations of Indian printed and painted textiles were popular in Europe, in Japan, people still preferred to obtain original Indian textiles which surpassed their imitations in both color and design. Unlike Europe, where Indian textiles were constantly supplied through traders, in Japan in the Edo period, the Japanese were not allowed to travel abroad and their access to imported objects was limited. Besides, Japan had a long tradition of holding objects from foreign cultures in high regard; for instance, goods from China had been admired as *karamono*, which originally meant goods brought from China but came to cover all imported goods. Such were the social and cultural circumstances in which the Japanese people valued imported Indian and Persian textiles. Moreover, the tea ceremony seems to have been another key factor in increasing the value of these objects. As a result of Persian and Indian textiles being used as covers for tea caddies or as decoration on hanging scrolls, they were valued as part of the authoritative system of the tea ceremony.

In the introduction of *The Social Life of Things*, Arjun Appadurai uses the term politics “in the broad sense of relations, assumptions, and contests pertaining to power” and states that: “Politics is what links value and exchange in the social life of commodities.”<sup>33</sup> As described in this paper, the Japanese use of Persian and Indian textiles in the context of clothing, the tea ceremony, and accoutrement in early modern Japan, clearly shows that textiles as a commodity were also part of that exchange.

---

<sup>32</sup> Kobe (1994), p. 18, no. 125; Ogasawara (2005), pp. 122-123.

<sup>33</sup> Appadurai, Arjun. *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge, 1986, p. 57.



## Bibliography

- Gotoh (2001): Gotoh Museum. *Torai Orimono heno Akogare* [Adoration of Imported Textiles], Tokyo, 2001.
- Gotoh (2008): Gotoh Museum. *Kowatari Sarasa* [Antique Printed and Painted Indian Cotton Textiles], Tokyo, 2008.
- Kamada (2011a): Kamada, Yumiko. *Flowers on Floats: The Production, Circulation, and Reception of Early Modern Indian Carpets*, Ph.D. dissertation, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, January, 2011.
- Kamada (2011b): Kamada, Yumiko. "The Attribution and Circulation of Flowering Tree and Medallion Design Deccani Embroideries," in Haidar, Navina Najat and Marika Sardar eds. *Sultans of the South: Arts of India's Deccan Courts, 1323-1687*, New York, 2011, pp. 132-147.
- Kirihata (1994): Kirihata, Ken. *Meibutsugire* [Famed Fabrics], Kyoto, 1994.
- Kobe (1994): Kobe City Museum. *Sakoku: Nagasaki Bōeki no Hana* [Trade at Nagasaki under Seclusion Policy], Kobe, 1994.
- Kumagai (2009): Kumagai, Hiroto. *Wazaraza Monyō Zufu* [Catalogue of Japanese Cotton Textiles], Tokyo, 2009.
- Kyoto (1979): Kyoto National Museum. *Meibutsugire* [Famed Fabrics], Kyoto, 1979.
- Kyoto (1985): Kyoto National Museum. *Daitokuji no Meihō* [Art Treasures of Daitoku-ji Temple], Kyoto, 1985.
- Ogasawara (2005): Ogasawara Sae. *Sarasa* [Indian cotton textiles], Tokyo, 2005.
- Sugimura (1994): Sugimura, Toh. *Jūtan: Silk Road no Hana* [Carpet: Flower of the Silk Road], Tokyo, 1994.
- Tobacco (2005): Tobacco and Salt Museum. *Tabako-ire* [Cigarette Case], Tokyo, 2005.
- Tokyo (2008): Tokyo National Museum. *Kyūtei no Miyabi* [Courtly Millennium], Tokyo, 2008.