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COSTUME ART IN THE NOH THEATER COMMUNITY

Abstract

The article examines costumes in the context of the Noh theater community. The author proposes an understanding of these costumes as part of theatrical practice, as well as a means of sociocultural self-identification, and analyzes representative samples; the most typical motifs, compositional schemes, design approaches are determined. The article also focuses on accessories that make up the ensemble, both for the stage (mask, fan) and off-stage (*netsuke*, fan, *obidome*).

Key words: Noh theater (*Nōgaku*), Noh theater community, Japanese costume, Noh masks, Japanese costume accessories, theater costume collections

BACKGROUND

Noh theater costume is one of the many unique phenomena of Japanese culture. Its high artistic value has attracted the due attention of researchers of this theatrical tradition. So far, Noh costume has been considered mainly in the context of more general research on the history of Japanese costume or Noh theater as a whole. The writings of Alan Kennedy (1990), Fujii Kenzo (1993), Nagasaki Iwao (1992), Kawakami Shigeki (1993; 1997), Takeda Sharon Sadako (2002), Marlyne Kherlakian (2002) should be mentioned among this body of research. Moreover, theatrical works discuss the basic stages of theatrical costume formation, its types and its significance during the performance (Bethe, 2016; Denney, 2000; San Diego Museum of Art, 2003). In art literature, individual designs of Noh costume illustrate sophisticated textile techniques (Stinchecum, 2005; Kiri-hata, 1993). At the

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same time, the costume and theatrical tradition of the *Nōgaku* 能楽 are not limited to creating a stage image, they are much wider and more complex. The purpose of the article is to understand Noh costume in the context of the traditions of the Noh theater community and to identify different types of their relationship.

The main ideas of this article were formed under the influence of Nagasaki Owao's work 『「きもの」と文様: 日本の形と色』 (*"Kimono" and Patterns: Japanese Form and Color*) (1999), as well as on the author's own personal experience and observations during classes held at Kyoto Summer Theater School in 2017 and 2019.

SOURCES AND METHODS

The main sources for the study of the issue concerned are divided into three groups. The first group is represented by samples of costumes related to the Noh theatrical tradition. The second group represents video and photo materials concerning theatrical practice. The third group represents texts on history, theory and Noh practice. The issue of research and the specificity of sources determined the choice of research methods. Methods of systematization and classification, comparative, formal, figuratively stylistic and semantic analysis, methods of photo and video recording, as well as interviewing are used in the study.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The ritual basis of Noh (Nō 能) theater determines certain peculiarities of its functioning, performance design, and creative techniques. Since the play is of ritual importance, it is believed that the actor plays primarily for the gods, and the audience is simply looping on. Hence, all activities in the theater are purely collective. There is no director here, there are no "stars" in the European sense, and there is no rigid distribution of responsibilities. Each performance is the result of a collective act of creation "here" and "now", where, of course, benchmarks are in each of the groups of performers – the leader of the musicians, the *shite* (シテ), the actor who plays the leading role – among the actors. At a previous rehearsal, the latter identifies certain nuances of the upcoming performance and all members of the

troupe coordinate their actions with it. The *kōken* (後見), whose task is to prepare the stage and props, watches over the course of the performance and, in case of injury to an actor, replaces him on stage regardless of the role.

This principle of organization of the theater explains the absence of a theater artist. The actor's costume is his personal property, or the property of the theater. Particularly valuable types of attire can be a gift of patrons of the troupe, which is stipulated by the lack of specific designs of theatrical costume. Although almost all kinds of outfits can be used (or have been used before) in life outside the theater, they occupy the highest stage in the clothing hierarchy. The difference lies in their exquisite magnificence, high artistic value and means of dressing. Therefore, in the show itself we see both valuable pieces of clothing donated by princes and those specially commissioned in a workshop that produces dress for local people. In the latter case, the design concept belongs to the customer/actor and is processed by a leading specialist in an appropriate textile workshop, or is also the result of a collaboration.

The importance of a Noh costume in the performance, its ability to convey the time of year, the character's emotional truth, as well as to create a special mood were already noted by Zeami Motokiyo (世阿弥 元清, 1363–1443), in the 15th century. As Bethe writes,

In the *Fūshikaden* 風姿花伝 (*Transmitting the flower through effects and attitudes*), he goes so far as to define the portrayal of certain roles by their costume, particularly roles that cannot be played realistically by a male actor, such as women, deities, and Chinese. Zeami also comments on the effectiveness of other actors' costuming – an expressive element that adds a fresh touch to a well-known piece. (Bethe, 2016, p. 67)

During the reign of the Tokugawa (徳川) Shoguns, the collecting of theatrical costumes expanded, when not only the Samurai but also wealthy educated locals joined in the study of song and dance. Firstly, this was caused by the needs of theatrical practice that may be observed today: private collections of contemporary actors' theatrical attire have been collected by several generations of a thespian dynasty. Secondly, it showed the high artistic quality of the attire used on the stage. Eventually, at the end of the Edo era, a *Ken'eirō gasō* (献英楼画叢 *Collection of Exquisite Designs*) was compiled, containing colorful images of costumes and masks and theatrical props.

It is usually decided directly on the day of the performance, or the day before, in which particular attire actors will appear during the performance. The actors bring in 2–3 pieces of clothing that match the specifics of their roles, and together they choose those that will harmonize with each other on stage. The last word in the choice of clothing belongs to the *shite*.

At the same time, a costume in a Noh play could not have been anything but revolutionary concerning this tradition or the result of the actor's arbitrary choices. Gradually, a list of types of outfits that can be used in particular plays, types of patterns that decorate clothes and fans were formed, and rules for the use of color in clothing according to the type of play or role were approved. For example, in professional Noh terminology, women's costume complexes are divided into two types – *iroiri* (色入り – with color or red) and *ironashi* (色無し – without color or without red). The first type of dress, made in various shades of red, is intended for the roles of young girls, while the second is worn in various shades of blue, green, brown, magenta (but without bright red) for the role of middle-aged and elderly women. A white collar (as opposed to a colored one) in the main character's (*shite*) costume indicates their higher status.

In addition, it is customary to distinguish between costumes belonging to the *ōsode* group (大袖 – literally “big sleeves”) and the *kosode* group (小袖 – literally “small sleeves”). Usually, *ōsode* includes outdoor clothing (*kariginu* 狩衣, *chōken* 長絹, *maiginu* 舞衣, *happi* 法被, *mizugoromo* 水衣), while *kosode* includes different types of kimono with small holes for the wrist (*karaori* 唐織, *atsuita* 厚板, *surihaku* 摺箔, *nuihaku* 縫箔). Pants, headbands, belts and other accessories are added to the costume. In the Noh tradition, although combinations of clothing and drapery techniques for different types of roles (warrior, aristocrat, monk, demon, etc.) have become codified, these are kept within such general constraints. Thus, the final choice of colors and patterns is usually up to the actor.

Over time, certain roles have become associated with specific types of clothing, patterns and methods of dressing. At a Noh art workshop, teachers (actors at the Kanze School) demonstrated the attire for the role of Atsumori (敦盛), the hero of the 14th-century playwright, Zeami Motokiyo. It is noteworthy that in addition to several layers of old-fashioned clothing cut in the traditional way, a thick layer of fabric is additionally placed to form a more bulky plastic shape. Interestingly, all actors, regardless of status, have learned the technique of dressing, and help to dress each other. It is customary to use a *kariginu* with a pattern consisting of octagons and

quadrangles for the role of Okina (翁), one of the oldest plays in the repertoire of the Noh. Changes in the state of the hero are also marked by the transformation of clothing. The researcher Joyce Denney notes that *nuihaku* is used for a female role in the play “Dōjōji” (道成寺), it is enriched by an outer layer of *karaori*: a black or dark blue background with multi-colored scattered round rings.

Late in the play, when the woman is revealed as a demonic serpent, the *nuihaku* is folded down at the waist in a draping style called *koshimaki* (‘waist wrap’), which shows an inner robe patterned with glittering gold triangles that represent the scales of the serpent. (Denney, 2000)

The clothes of the musicians (*hayashikata* 囃子方) and assistants on the stage are also clearly regulated. Since they are on stage all the time, it is customary to use a strict and solemn outfit, namely a *hakama* (袴) and *haori* (羽織) with coats of arms, or a *kamishimo* (袷) or *nagakamishimo* (長袷) with coats of arms. Although all three variants of attire belong to the formal set, they differ in level. The choice of outfit depends on the status of the play. Usually, a drama (or memorial performance, in memory of a great actor, etc.) requires the use of the *kamishimo*.

The above applies to the performance itself. If only a solo performance is intended, then clothing from everyday life is used. However, for a high formal level, a kimono with coats of arms and a *hakama* will be worn. In this way, it is emphasized that the performance is a collective ritual for the gods, while a solo performance is a demonstration by the actor of the style of his school and the individual peculiarities of the performance of the vocal and choreographic texts of the play.

In addition, performances in a *hakama* (also called *hakama-Noh* 袴能) are performed in the summer, when it is hot in the cities. On the one hand, this facilitates movement for the actor, while on the other hand, requires even more refinement, since all the nuances of performing *kata* (major choreographic movements) are much easier to see in a *hakama*. That is why *hakama-Noh* is in demand among connoisseurs. Therefore, in this case, the achromatic visual impression of this type of performance is only disturbed by flashes of a golden or silver fan in the actor’s hand.

Regarding the latter, it should be noted that in Noh theater the largest fan sizes are used. It is customary to distinguish between two types of fan, namely: *shizume-ōgi* (鎮扇, similar in design to conventional fans)

and *chūkei* (中啓, 33–33.5 cm long, without an external protective plate, which allows you to see the color and pattern even when rotated). *Chūkei* fans are used by *shite* (シテ) and *waki* (ワキ) actors and *shizume-ōgi* by choir members, stage assistants, musicians and *aikyōgen* (間狂言) performers.

The pattern on the fan makes it possible to immediately distinguish a Noh actor from a Kyōgen (狂言) artist, student from master, in order to determine their belonging to a particular school. For example, students' fans are made of white paper and decorated with a monochrome pattern, while those for actors are made of gold or silver foil with multicolored drawings. Moreover, in the fans for Kyōgen performances (and students' rehearsals) three stylized branches of pine are used, while for Noh fans there are approved patterns corresponding to their respective school, namely: three rows of waves (Kanze School 観世流); five clouds (Hōshō School 宝生流); clouds, or nine circles symbolizing the stars (Kongo School 金剛流); five circles (Konparu School 金春流); and three clouds (Kita School 喜多流).

The lead actor chooses the fan last, guided by the peculiarities of the style of his school and, at the same time, keeping an eye on the overall balance of all the components of the costume. Emerald pines, or pink peonies on gold paper flutter like a bunch of flowers in symphony with the multicolored silk of the actor's attire.

However, one of the most important aspects of the costume is the mask that the *shite* actor usually uses. There are more than 200 types of masks in the Noh arsenal that match certain roles. Today, quite often, actors – either professionals or amateurs – become carvers of masks. Among the members of the Kongo School, is the carver Udaka Michishige, considered to be a national treasure (Udaka, 2018). It is noticeable that the mask does not usually cover the face completely. Therefore, the viewer does not see a demon on the stage, but a figure in a demon mask. The actor actually controls the perception of the mask: by tilting or raising their head, the shadows change its expression.

Summarizing the overview of the elements of stage dress, we note that they are perceived in the entirety of all artistic aspects of the performance. The ascetic stage space, unadorned or deprived of scenery, is focused on the sheer beauty of the masks and combined with several layers of lush attire that give the actor an almost sculptural presence. The slow movements, the rhythmic recitative, the intricate rhythms and intonations of music and singing, the shimmering and restrained luster of silk kimonos,

the moving shadows on the masks, all create a refined meditative effect and correspond to the feminine concept of *yugen* (幽玄), which translates as “quiet elegance” or “subtle beauty”.

From time immemorial, the theater had been under the patronage of the Samurai elite, with Noh performances being an elitist spectacle that satisfied the tastes of the upper classes. The solemn elegance of Noh, the realization of its cultural significance, led the desire of the adherents of this theatrical tradition to study it and demonstrate their attributes to the world of high art. Therefore, in the days of the Edo period, when Kabuki theater (歌舞伎) came into being and flourished, women of the Samurai clans showed a fondness for Noh, using traditional theater patterns in their own clothing: pine trees, clouds, waves. The pine tree reminded one of its obligatory depiction on theatrical backdrops, while waves and clouds corresponded to the patterns on the fans of the leading schools. In this way, they deliberately distinguished themselves from the wealthy merchants who admired Kabuki and sorted out the vulgar (according to the aristocrats) manners, hairstyles, colors, and means of dress from those of the elite.

Following this, for some time supporters of Kabuki gained the upper hand in the “fancy costume competitions”. The development of the theatrical genre in engraving, which thoroughly conveyed the features of the actor’s outfit, its colors and patterns, contributed to the spread of Kabuki-fashion: textile masters willingly used ready-made graphic solutions in kimono and *obi* (帯) design. In contrast, Noh Theater did not have such a solid graphic background that textiles could serve.

The situation changed after the Meiji Revolution, when Noh Theater gained state support as an art form that was praised by Western powers and worthy of representing Japan internationally. The abolition of class restrictions allowed the general population to become involved in the culture of the aristocracy, including the Noh tradition. Amateur groups were set up to study dances and songs under the guidance of experienced actors. A new community was gradually formed, united by its fascination of Noh.

Currently, it is made up of “mischief-makers” who, aware of their high cultural status, have consciously ordered individual items of clothing with the image of masks. Until the middle of the 20th century, these were mainly components of the male costume array: *juban* (襦袢), *haori*, *netsuke* (根付).

It should be noted that the listed items are usually invisible to passers-by as they decorate undergarments. Although the exception is *netsuke*, this precious little thing was only visible at a very close distance. Thus, this

way of using motifs testifies to the personal experience of the importance of belonging to a community.

The gradual development of amateur groups, the democratization of all spheres of life, and the development of the economy in post-war Japan led to the mass participation of women in the study of Noh. Here starts gradual penetration of the images of city women, associated with this theatrical tradition, into kimono design. Therefore, the accumulation of imaginative experience in the field of Noh contributed to this: although from the later days of Meiji periods, generations of artists developed plots related to theatrical practice, in painting, graphics and puppetry (Merrit & Yamada, 1975; Shaap & Rimer, 2010). Among the most common images are those of actors in the performance of a particular role with characteristic gestures, positions of legs and arms, as well as dress. Repeatedly reproduced in lines and colors, the figures of the actors are transferred to the compositional structure of kimono decoration. The perfect graphic expressiveness of silhouettes allows one to use them effectively as a decorative element. For example, one of the most common Noh design solutions is the *tsukesage* (付け下げ) scheme of decoration: the actors' figures are located on the upper right side (on the shoulder) and in separate groups along the hem. As no figure in this variant is repeated, the eye moves from one image to the next, allowing the viewer him/herself to know what movements the actor performs – most often, the basic models are depicted: *kamae* (構工); *hakobi* (運び); *sashikomi* (さし込み); *hiraki* (ヒラキ), etc. By the type of mask and dress combined with the type of movement, one can establish not only the roles played by the actors being portrayed, but also the exact scenes.

Graphically expressive silhouettes and a colorful cast of actors has made this motif one of the most beloved in the textile industry: in addition to a number of variations in the *tsukesage*, it can also be seen in the *hōmongi* (訪問着). However, as the *hōmongi* scheme requires a solid composition on the hem, in this case, individually scattered figures of actors are combined with a pattern of summer grass.

The status of the Noh theater itself and the sophisticated entertainment it offers comply with a higher level of formality for a married woman's kimono called a *kurotomesode* (黒留袖). Decoration fringing its lower part formed by large figures of demons in bright wigs and hieroglyphic text can serve an example of *kurotomesode*.

Despite the prevalence of this specified scheme, one may note the variability in its implementation: first, while maintaining the general

compositional scheme, what it is filled with can change each time due to the choice of characters, or the style of their image. For example, figures can be interpreted as decorative or graphic, as a quick sketch, or as picturesque.

The peculiarities of stage dress have not recently affected performance technique. Therefore, as wide sleeves are typical for all types of Japanese clothing, this has led to the setting of one's hands slightly bent at elbows. As the use of a mask prevents a panoramic view of the scene, the actor sees only what is ahead. Hence the slowness of movement, while the direction of view changes with the rotation of the whole body. This also is the case for those actors who act without a mask. An open face in a Noh theatrical performance does not involve reflecting emotions, as the actor should behave as if they are in a mask (the so-called "straight face"). All this informs the whole action of stylistic unity. The mask also enhances the specific timbre when reciting the text.

Thus, the multilayered garment and weight of fabrics give monumentality to the whole figure and slows down their movements. Yamaguchi Yasujirō (山口 安次郎, 1904–2010) was a famous Kyoto weaver who made lightweight fabrics for costumes in recent decades (Yamaguchi, 2019, p. 1). Despite the respect and appreciation of his work, it should be noted that in professional circles of actors, some actors believe that while this option is more comfortable for the performer, it affects the plastic appearance, silhouette and character of the movement.

The second most common motif is a close-up mask. It should be noted that this was facilitated not only by an awareness of cultural value of the Noh, but also by experience gained in making a *netsuke* in the form of a mask (called *men-netsuke* 面根付). Usually they were made by the same masters who cut masks for the theater. Subsequently, theatrical masks became not only a kind of precious item on one's belt, but also a decoration of the inner lining of men's clothing or under-robe called the *juban*. Although the *netsuke* is a charming accessory, it also sometimes looks like a comic accessory showing almost the whole repertoire of real masks. In clothes, however, masks that symbolized the wish of good luck were used in its inner part of the clothing lying closer to the body. More often it is the mask of old Okina (翁). In women's clothing masks of young girls such as Ko-Omote (小面) or Kohime (小姫) are used. They adorn *iroto mesode* (色留袖), belts for women's clothing, *haori* and etc. Therefore, for example, in the late 1990s, several variants of *tomesode* were developed here, where a mask is the only pictorial element located against the backdrop of colorful stripes.

The image of the mask against a background of bamboo in the decorative solution presented by *kurotomesode* gives special nobility to the outfit, while additionally displaying the taste and education of its owner. Compositions containing a variety of masks, as in decorative design of the *hōmongi*, are seen much less frequently. The graphic expressiveness of masks, and the accuracy of silhouettes have made them a favorite element of decoration in women's clothing.

It should be noted that all the decorative elements which are treated as an array of patterns of the Noh tradition are used only in the design of dresses of the highest formal level and never in everyday clothes.

Summarizing results of this analysis of the models of off-stage dress, it should be noted that patterns were mostly used at an early stage in the kimono design – the spread of the Noh motifs in women's clothing: various types of outdoor clothing, belts, accessories (*obi-dome* 帯留め and fans). On the one hand, such active use of Noh images may be explained by the fact that in modern Japan women are more likely to use traditional attire as festive dress than men, while on the other hand, it can be explained by the fact of the feminization of this theatrical tradition. During the 20th century, with the development of amateur groups, women joined the practice of Noh theater and today make up a significant majority among amateur performers. Indeed, a remarkable event of the 21st century was the appearance of women on the stage in professional performances of Noh theater.

CONCLUSIONS

As a result, it should be noted that in the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st century, costumes with Noh motifs are represented by two sets, namely: stage and off-stage. The first set defines the visual image of the performance in the absence of scenery and is the main focus of the scene. The means of dressing, which form a more voluminous and expressive plastic figure of the actor, influenced the development of acting techniques and modes of movement.

The patterns used in the stage costume, as a rule, belong to one of three groups, that is buddhist, floral and geometric. When choosing a model, the actor relies on tradition, handed-down recommendations of the great masters of their respective school, as well as on their own reading and understanding of the role, and aspects of the hero's character they want to emphasize.

Pine trees, wave motifs and especially a pattern called “the stream” beloved by the Kanze School are among the patterns used in off-stage kimono design. In general, the development of the Noh motives in off-stage clothing can be represented as a development from inside out (from *juban* to kimono, *haori*, *michiyuki* etc.), as movement from abstract patterns to the representation of real objects and the figures of actors performing recognizable patterns of movement. The representativeness of the Noh motives in modern costume plays not only aesthetic role in the Noh tradition, but also an identifying role in pointing one out as belonging to the Noh community.



Actors Noh, *tsukesage*, fan, 1990s (private collection).



Actors Noh, *tsukesage*, fragment, silk, 1990s (private collection).



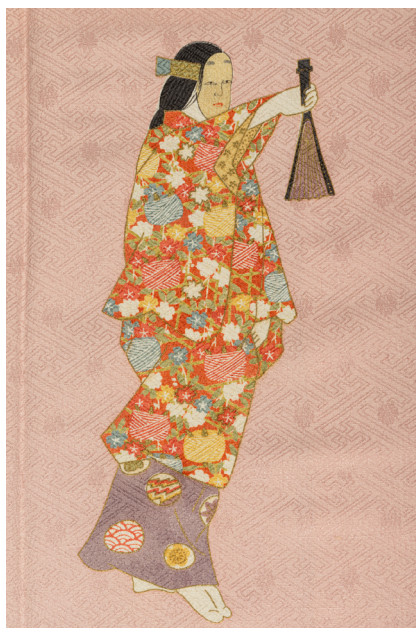
Actors Noh, *tsukesage*, fragment, silk, 1990s (private collection).



Actors Noh, *tsukesage*, fragment, silk, 1990s (private collection).



Actors Noh, *tsukesage*, fragment, silk, 1990s (private collection).



Actors Noh, *tsukesage*, fragment, silk, 1990s (private collection).



Fan for the stage, Kanze School, 2010s (private collection).



Karaori Noh Theater robe; Yasujirō Yamaguchi, Kyoto, 1999, Musée des Tissus MTMAD, Lyon (public domain).



Ko-Omote Mask, 2008 (private collection).



Netsuke, Okina Mask, 19th c. (private collection).

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