



Summer Robe (*Katabira*) with Plants, Courty Carriages, and Brushwood Fences

Edo period, 19th century
(Collection of the Tokyo National Museum)

A woman from a samurai family would have worn such a gorgeous, unlined *katabira* made of hemp-like fabric, adorned with an indigo-dyed design and embroidery, as summer apparel.

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

OYAMA YUZURUHA

Sewn with *jofu* (fine-quality, linen-like cloth) woven from fine ramie² thread, this *furi-sode* (long-sleeved kimono) was worn by a young, unmarried woman from a samurai family during the hottest days of summer. The unlined *katabira*, featuring a design of a landscape with trailing mist dyed in a monochromatic indigo tone, is plainly cool and refreshing to behold. Meanwhile, silk threads in colors such as *beni* (crimson) and *moegi* (light yellowish green),³ gold threads, and other details add colorful accents. In the late Edo period, women from samurai families began to dress in garments featuring stylized designs differing from those worn by ordinary townswomen, and this idealized landscape pattern is a prime example.

The background on the back side of the *Katabira* shows a *hiogi* fans⁴ set amid a landscape with a luxuriant growth of pines and blossoming cherry trees. The foreground on the hem side features a design with autumn-flowering plants such as chrysanthemums, bush clovers, and balloon flowers, as well as a motif of a straw hat and raincoat flung in front of the gate to a house and a *gisssha*⁵ court-cow-carriage. One might wonder about the significance of representing two seasons, spring and autumn, in a single kimono, with symbols of courtly culture, including the *hiogi* fan and the court-cow-carriage, mixed in.

In fact, the garment features symbolic representations of a pair of different characters from two different stories. The spring landscape of the

Summer Robe (*Katabira*) with Plants, Courty Carriages, and Brushwood Fences

The kimono is much more than a garment; it is a symbol of traditional Japanese culture. The kimono of contemporary Japan originated with the short-sleeved *kosode* and the long-sleeved *furi-sode* robe, in the Edo period (early 17th century to mid-late 19th century). In the hottest days of summer, *katabira* (light, unlined kimono woven from hemp) were worn. From among the various forms of these *katabira* summer garments, this article spotlights a kimono featuring brilliant dyeing and embroidery that would have been worn by a woman from a samurai family in the *O-oku*¹ (inner chambers) of Edo Castle, the shogun's residence, in the late Edo period.



Koshimaki (Summer Garment), Plum, Camellia, Hexagon and Floral Lozenge Design on Red Black Plain Weave Ground with Glossed Weft (full piece and detail)

Edo period, 18th century
(Collection of the Tokyo National Museum)

Said to have been worn by Tanehime, as with the *sage-obi*. The *koshimaki* is a garment worn as formal dress by women of samurai families starting in the 16th century. In the late Edo period, the garment design became increasingly formalized, featuring auspicious designs dyed and intricately embroidered, against backgrounds of red-tinged black.

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



Sage-Obi Sash, Brocade with Carriage Wheel, Wisteria and Peony Design on Green and White Tiered Ground

Edo period, 18th century
(Collection of the Tokyo National Museum)

A *sage-obi* sash said to have been worn by Tanehime, wife of the 10th head of the Kishu Tokugawa clan. The ends of the 370-cm sash, adorned with opulent brocade, feature cylindrical forms into which paper tubes can be inserted.

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



Formal *koshimaki* attire of a woman from a samurai family in the late Edo period (shown as worn)

A *katabira* tied with a *sage-obi* sash, with the sleeves of a *koshimaki* threaded over both sticking out ends of it. The formal attire of a woman from a samurai family, thus stylized in the late Edo period.

backdrop seems to depict a scene from a chapter entitled *Hana no En* (“The Cherry Blossom Banquet”) from *Genji Monogatari* (“The Tale of Genji”),⁶ a work of dynastic literature from the Heian period. This would represent Lady Oborozukiyo, who exchanged fans with protagonist Hikaru Genji as a proof of their night together. The autumnal foreground scene, on the other hand, appears to depict a scene from *Kayoi Komachi* (“The Wooing of Komachi”), a work of Noh, a traditional Japanese performing art form favored by samurai families since the Middle Ages. This represents the character Fukakusa no Shosho, who paid 100 nightly visits in a row to Ono no Koma-

chi,⁷ a woman of unparalleled beauty, to win her love, whether in rain or in snow, wearing a straw hat and raincoat and spending the nights on a platform for court-cow-carriage. What must a young woman from a samurai family have felt adorning herself with such a garment depicting these two characters who lived on the path of love?

This may not necessarily have corresponded, however, to a dreamy state of elegance. As a matter of fact, this costume was the most prestigious formal summer dress worn by women of samurai families in the *O-oku* during the late Edo period. There were also customs concerning how it was to be worn. For this *katabira*, a thin *obi*

sash called a *sage-obi* is to be wrapped around the waist, tied in back, and paper tubes inserted at both sides, extending to the left and right like arms. The sleeves of a garment called a *koshimaki* are threaded over both sides of these prominences and its main *migoro*⁸ portion wrapped around the waist and tucked into the front of the sash. (Refer to the photo). The *koshimaki* is adorned with gorgeous, finely detailed embroidery featuring an auspicious design, giving the plainly evident impression of prestigious, dignified apparel. It must not have been so easy to walk in the *O-oku*, inner chambers of Edo Castle, looking like a bird with its wings spread.

1. A space within Edo Castle known as the living space for the shogun’s wives and concubines.
2. Thread spun from finely fragmented stem cortex fibers of *Boehmeria nivea* var. *nipponnivea*, a perennial plant in the nettle family (*Urticaceae*), known in Japanese as *choma* or *karamushi*. A raw material used to make hemp-like fabrics.
3. Both traditional Japanese hues. *Beni* is a yellow-tinged shade of red. *Moegi* is a shade of green evoking the look of fresh verdure at the outset of spring.
4. Folding hand fans made of 20 to 30 slats of *hinoki* cypress wood.
5. Known as a *Gosho-guruma* as well, a type of carriage used to transport members of the noble class from the Heian period (c. 794 to the late 12th century), originally drawn by oxen.
6. A long-form tale set in the mid-Heian period and consisting of 54 chapters. Written by Murasaki Shikibu, a lady of the court. Details various love stories involving Hikaru Genji, who was born as the son of the emperor of the time. The 8th chapter, *Hana no En*, describes a springtime romantic episode in the protagonist’s 20th year.
7. A female *waka* poet of the Heian period, thought to have been active in the mid-9th century. Later made into a figure considered to be a woman of unmatched beauty.
8. A term encompassing the front and back panels of a kimono, not including the collar, sleeves, etc.