The Japanese temperament has always expressed itself with particular sympathy in the art of costume, and the robes in our current exhibition are exquisitely apt adaptations of design and material to the requirements of various moods, occasions, seasons. Most of them were worn by rich and aristocratic women, from the last part of the Ashikaga period (1392-1572) through the Momoyama (1573-1603) and Tokugawa periods (1604-1868). In the Ashikaga and Momoyama examples especially they show the last stages of a long tradition of Chinese influence on aristocratic Japanese taste; in the Tokugawa group we can see the development of peculiarly Japanese taste, expressed in Japanese terms and techniques, for a large and wealthy middle class.

Most of the robes seen here are the richly decorated outer kimonos (uchikake), of either short- or long-sleeved cut (kosode or furisode), worn unbound over the regular kimono on ceremonial or important social occasions. A few robes worn in the No, a classical lyric drama dating back to the middle ages of Japan, are included from the collections of the Metropolitan Museum. Their decorative conventions and stiff heavy material, adapted to the formal projections of drama from a lighted stage, form an interesting contrast with the softer robes of ordinary life.

The screens, each with one or two robes folded over a garment rack against a gold-leaf background, were made up in Japan at the request of the collector, Shojiro Nomura, early in this
century as a means of display and preservation for the more frail and fragmentary of the robes. Most of the robes were actually reassembled, having been cut up and made into priest robes by various temples which had been given the robes centuries before. The representation of a robe or costume on a rack is a traditional design theme in Japan called *tagasode* and has been used on screens, prints, paintings, lacquer, and kimono decoration.

Dating of the brilliant variety of styles in Japanese robes may be accomplished, in general, in three ways. Comparison with costume in dated paintings or prints is sometimes possible. Also, collections of kimono designs, for use like that in our fashion magazines today, were published at least as early as the late seventeenth century. Often in these collections of so-called “embryos” or beginnings (*Hinagata*), the date and place of publication are given: their titles sometimes include the name of a famous artist, like Kiyonaga, as designer. Finally, an ancient custom in Japan preserves beautiful costume and the dates associated with it: when a lady dies her important kimono may be willed to her daughters, but often, if she be devout, the most beautiful will be given as a memorial by her heirs to her favorite temple or monastery, to be made into priest robes and altar cloths or used in the various temple dramas. The robes on the screens were found largely in such places, with the donor and the date of donation recorded in bold letters on their linings. The dating we have used in labeling Mr. Nomura’s robes and screens was supplied by the collector himself, presumably arrived at by all three of these methods.

The robes themselves, as to design and technique, fall into certain groups that reflect the taste and the social and historical conditions in Japan from the late fourteenth through the nineteenth century.

The robes of the late Ashikaga and Momoyama periods come from feudal times with an established civil and military aristocracy supported by a rice economy and enriched by a

Detail of a Momoyama robe showing various traditional motifs. All the objects illustrated in this article are from the Nomura collection.
flourishing trade with both Europe and Asia. They were made for highborn ladies both of the Kyoto and of the various provincial courts. China still provided an important cultural influence, as she had in the past, because of her geographical position between Japan and the rest of the world; silk weaving and silk textiles themselves came first from there. In spite of agricultural uprisings, the taste of these times is based on what Sansom has called the “flourishing arts of peace” and the “fastidious standards of the Muromachi (Ashikaga) aesthetics,” and these persist in combination with a certain baroque strength and brilliance developing to meet the tastes of the energetic Momoyama shoguns. These earliest robes in our exhibition belong to three distinct stylistic types from the point of view of design and technique. Their cut came from T’ang China centuries before and has continued almost unchanged in Japan until today, in spite of many modifications of costume in China in the same centuries.

The first type (page 116), reflecting a taste for rich, enamel-like, finely wrought detail, continues in general the effect of the Chinese brocade imported for centuries for Japanese costume. A fine dark brown silk tabby is embroidered in brilliant shades of vermilion, orange, green, and white silk floss, with couched gold detail, to present a dense all-over pattern of traditional foliage like the Pine, Plum, and Bamboo, or the Flowers of the Four Seasons, intermingled with objects symbolizing riches and good fortune, with various fragmentary diapers with auspicious overtones, and, frequently, with the crane and tortoise for longevity. This is the only type of robe decoration worked out in terms of a repeat, and even so, the effect aimed at is of all-over patterning.

The decoration of the second group of robes (see right) employs this small brilliant embroidery for accenting detail only and shows already the Japanese genius for asymmetry in decoration, with big, boldly contrasting color areas, often of orange, white, or black-brown—the black diapered with small patterns in imprinted gold, with strategically placed decorative and naturalistic detail in fine close tie dye as well as in the fine silk and metal embroidery noted above. The mountain landscape of Japan, with its volcanic peaks high in clouds, its waterfalls
and snow, and the brilliant and varied trees and flowers of the lower slopes, often seems to furnish motifs that are abstracted and recombined to produce this most beautiful type of robe decoration. The examples here all have as a ground fabric a soft silk damask with a small allover ground pattern of swastika meander set at regular intervals with small flower sprays, in tabby on a satin ground. This type of fabric, first made in China, became very popular in Japan and was produced there in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in great quantity. These robes are still probably of Chinese silk which came in as part of the lively trade of the time.

A third group of these early robes shows an entirely different type of fabric decoration representing a renowned Momoyama specialty, though it appears on some robes of Ashikaga date. This decoration consists of an extremely subtle and ingenious form of tie dye sensitively reserving in a dyed ground various natural forms—leaves, flowers, birds—which are then enhanced with touches of freehand drawing or brushed delicately with color. This reflects in general the style of the Sotatsu-Korin (or Koyetsu-Korin) school of painting. An early robe on one of the screens seems to show the withering flowers and leaves, gently past their prime, which were a favorite subject for this treatment. A fine silk tabby ground labeled "Kaga silk" by the collector, indicating a northern central province famous for its textiles and pottery, is used for this kind of decoration in these robes and probably is a product of Japanese silk weaving.

In the Tokugawa period the Shogun Ieyasu instituted a policy of national isolation which lasted from the first half of the seventeenth century until the advent of Admiral Perry in the nineteenth. A mercantile economy prevailed, with money the medium of exchange rather than the rice of earlier periods; a wealthy and sophisticated middle class of townspeople flourished with the new medium of exchange, while the civil and military aristocracy and the peasants and farmers were impoverished by it. The new capital was Yedo (modern Tokyo), where the pleasure-loving "Floating World" centered around the theater, the various gay quarters, restaurants, picnics, and festivals. Not only the wellborn ladies of the court, but even successful geisha and male actors of female parts in the theaters ordered robes to suit their own tastes and the prevailing modes. The artists and craftsmen of the age, like those of the Renaissance in Europe, included costume design among their productions; known collections of fashion plates go as far back as the second half of the seventeenth century. Decoration became from then on increasingly bold and lively, with motifs drawn from the vivid life of the day but always more or less controlled and stylized in accordance with a marvelously disciplined sense of decoration.

The robes of the early Tokugawa period seem to carry on in modified form the styles we have just seen as well as to suggest the beginnings of the bold, brilliant, and intensely Japanese robe style that was to burst forth at the end of the century.

A robe of about 1650. Silk damask with tie dye, embroidery, gold imprint, and freehand brushwork
characters from one to ten form the only decoration. One beautiful robe (page 119) seems closer to a decorative court painting school of the first half of the seventeenth century, the Kano school, strong then in Kyoto, than to the robe styles we have seen so far: a long yellow waterfall drops from clawing yellow waves and dark gnarled angular forms starred with a few white flowers suggesting an old plum tree, at the shoulders of the robe, to a whimsical tray table at the hem—these rendered in various skillful tie dyes with much freehand brushed or drawn detail; a few small embroidered chrysanthemums provide brilliant, beautifully spaced accents. This robe and many robes of this period are made of the fret-and-flower patterned damask originally imported from China and used more rarely in the earlier robes, but by this period probably made in Japan. Satin also appears in robes of this period, also originally from China and now usually made in Japan. An unusual ground is seen on an embroidered robe of the early seventeenth century—an silk tabby imprinted in gold with small all-over interlocked circles.

From the Kambun and Empo eras directly after the two great fires in Yedo (1657) and Kyoto (1661) come the most free, powerful, and purely Japanese designs (pages 120, 121, 122), as Japanese artists and designers responded to the challenge of restoring the living equipment of so many prosperous bourgeois, with little time and few earlier styles to consult. A style of decoration already hinted at in the first part of this century was developed, with large, boldly stylized asymmetrical forms focused between the shoulders or at one shoulder and floating or curling down the robe. Interpreted in various forms of tie dye and embroidery, usually on satin or the small-figured damask seen before, these robes represent a successful large immediate production to satisfy knowledgeable middle-class taste with a minimum of technical effort. A striking group in this exhibition shows the first bold stages of the style and its later effulgence into waves, river boats, waterfalls, rebus characters, festive motifs of various kinds, fans, flowers—all suitable to the occasions or seasons when the robes were to be worn. The contemporary paintings and prints of the newly developing “Pictures of the Floating World” school (Ukiyo-e) show figures clothed in
these same styles, and their artists are beginning to be noted as costume designers and to put out their own collections of fashion plates, like the one on page 122. A beautiful robe patterned entirely in the fine tie dye compared to fish eggs by Japanese connoisseurs is an example of one of the rarer, more restrained, and much sought-after luxuries of the age, far more difficult and time-consuming to produce than these robes boldly figured in embroidery.

Economic difficulties following this efflorescence caused the ruling class, still composed of the older aristocratic and samurai families whose taste and inclinations were far more restrained and traditional than those of the ebullient townspeople, to impose severe sumptuary reforms in the Tenwa era (1681-1683). Embroidery was limited, appliqué was substituted in many cases, fine tie dye was replaced by a printed imitation, and robes painted with India ink (sumi) became fashionable. Taste was necessarily restrained, but some of the most refinedly elegant robes in the exhibition come from this reform period. Two screens show robes with decorations painted in India ink. The second (page 123) has great accenting blotches of plum dyeing associated with Kaga province that contrast with the restraint and delicacy of the ink decoration and are produced by a form of tie dyeing covering much more space and requiring far less intensive skill and effort than the prohibited fine tie dye. A delightful pale yellow robe (page 124), its only decoration scattered flutes, some drawn and painted in pale colors, some produced by various forms of tie dye with black and blue dyes for coloring, is a charming puzzle. It seems a product of a reform period in the restraint of its design and coloring, but such skillful tie dye and drawing (even though there may be some retouching here) may be close to the late Momoyama tradition of the early seventeenth century. Appliqué, another stipulation of the reformers, is seen on a satin robe of Kambun style with a strange enigmatic design curling down from the shoulder; the embroidered areas are cut from another garment of older style and applied, possibly to get around restrictions forbidding elaborate embroidery.

Brilliant robes again reflect the life of the later part of the Genroku era around 1700, a lively reaction to the Tenwa and early Genroku trends of social reform and austere elegance. By this time the townspeople as a class had reached a high degree of affluence and culture, and the artistic impulse in Japan in general was more vital and widely diffused, less shaped by traditional influences, since it was no longer in the service solely of the aristocracy. At this time, too, the artists of the Ukiyo-e school, whose aim was to produce “Pictures of the Floating World” actually before their eyes, prefixed to their signatures “Japanese painter” to indicate their allegiance to the new point of view. Among Genroku robes we see much flashing red, a brave color always popular with samurai women but now more universally in demand. As a fashion book of the period declares, a soft red satin kimono reflects on the white face above it a flush as delicate as cherry blossoms. The most brilliant color effects, however, are achieved by a resist dyeing and painting technique known earlier in Kaga province but named after the artist and fan painter who perfected it and brought it to Kyoto—Yuzen. Robes patterned by this method are often of creped silk tabby (though it may be used on almost any fabric) and show

Section of a screen with an Empo era robe showing a Chinese palm against bamboo supports
clouds, patterned with tie dye and surrounded with brushed gold paint. Kyoto, where Yuzen spent his last years, was the center for the production of Yuzen decoration on all kinds of costumes and accessories. Yuzen-colored robes, in their bright and unfading beauty, were of special popularity with Kyoto ladies, who were cited for their frugality in gossipy commentaries of the day. It was remarked of them that they looked very different in festive garb at a cherry picnic from the way they did when prepared to go home at sunset, with their clean tabi in their pockets, their silver hairpins replaced by bamboo chopsticks, their expensive combs in their purses, their underskirts turned up to avoid wear, and their neck linings turned in to protect their robes from powder and paint. The robe on page 125, covered with scenes of Kyoto, is said to be from the hand of Yuzen himself, but the combination of painting and dyeing associated with his name was widely practiced by others in his lifetime and still goes on today in Japan along with silk-screen and other printing techniques.

Section of a screen with a robe of about 1685 in silk damask with reserve dyeing, freehand brushwork, and printing

finely drawn, miniaturist landscapes or interiors with brilliantly shaded colors achieved by the process of painting directly on the fabric with dyes, and with uncolored accenting detail and outlines of hairlike fineness drawn with rice paste as a resist before the color was applied. All kinds of delicate floral and decorative motifs were also charmingly rendered by this method in robes of the early eighteenth century and later (page 124) when decoration, more and more confined to the hem line of the robe, was rendered impressionistically with romantic faintness in imitation of painting styles. The Yuzen method of decoration was often combined with various forms of tie dye, other resist and sectional dyeing techniques, ink painting, and embroidery, and it lends itself naturally to all kinds of tour de force, one as seen on a robe showing many curtains, each with its own elaborate pattern, strung around a brilliant maple crowned with red

Wood block from a Kambun book of robe designs
The eighteenth century as a whole develops no new great styles, but enjoys an infinitely varied and enchanting play with styles and techniques already known; flashes of the many charming passing fads are revealed more in the literature and prints of the period than in the robes shown here. Contemporary printmakers' designs, alternate periods of reform and expansiveness, the personal taste of the owners, ever sensitive to the world of nature—all show in these robes. The world of the theater and the fashions preferred and worn by the actors of the day were of primary importance in Genroku life, but the robes that we show here seem to reflect more personal taste. A cross section of these lovely styles, in general more delicate and finely wrought both in design and technique, and increasingly more naturalistic than the seventeenth-century ones, may be seen in the rich restraint of the dark blue satin robe (page 126) embroidered with mandarin ducks and irises, with a flowering plum at the hem; the delicate brilliance of the pale blue damask (page 127), its hem and hanging sleeves decorated with various garden fences and trellises in Yuzen coloring and, rising beside them, exquisitely drawn chrysanthemums of many kinds, their petals gleaming in satin stitch or silhouetted in delicate paint and gold against the faintly patterned ground; the mood and subtlety of a robe (page 127) in silk tabby patterned by various kinds of dyeing to give the essence of early autumn on the beach, with a dim blue sky and central moon at the top, then a line of spray and misty waves, then, extending to the hem, curving sandbanks in faint aubergine dotted with feeding shore birds in printed tie dye, the pale water around them marked with silhouettes of water plants and sedges reserved in white with touches of dye, and small chrysanthemums, the autumn flower; or
finally the crisp loveliness of a white damask robe dramatically divided by curving deep blue rivers with dotted white currents in sectional and fine tie dye, the spaces between crowded with bush clover with heads of bright tie dye, leaves delicately colored by the Yuzen method with touches of embroidered silks and gold. Even this robe, suggesting the bolder style of the century before, has a certain lightness of treatment, a hint of naturalism, characteristic of eighteenth-century trends of decoration in general. Characteristic, too, with the increasing focus on the widening obi beginning in the Empo era at the end of the seventeenth century, is the gradual shift of decoration toward the hems, with family crests appearing across the shoulders, often arbitrarily selected by middle-class women in imitation of aristocratic usage.

Another reformation in the Tempo era (1830-1844) produced a series of severe economic restrictions on the increasingly extravagant and pleasure-centered life of the townspeople and laid a final restraining hand on robe decoration. The use of dark colors and a minimum of subtle patterning are still considered in the best taste, except for children and young girls, in Japan today. At the time of this reform the manufacture and sale of silk were actually banned. The apparent contrast between the severity of a great reform period and the luxuriance of an earlier period of extravagance, however, does not mean that the art of skillful and individual robe decoration did not continue into the nineteenth century. One of the most interesting robes in the Nomura collection is a man’s robe of dark gray cotton tabby with a yellow satin lining and a couched gold crest that indicates it was made for a person of consequence. It is embroidered, in cotton, in dull colors with scenes of Yedo, or Tokyo, after a series of prints by the great nineteenth-century artist Hiroshige. There is a Japa-

Opposite: Detail of the Genroku robe attributed to Yuzen
nese custom of "marrying" in a traditional ceremony any two objects that seem to form an inevitable pair. This dark and restrained man’s robe was chosen some thirty years ago as the perfect counterpart of the brilliant Yuzen robe shown on page 125. Each is decorated with scenes of one of the great cities of Japan, executed by an outstanding artist in the technique and materials characteristic of its period; despite their contrast of brilliance with darkness, they form a perfect illustration of the continuity of Japanese design.

Detail of a satin robe embroidered in silk, metal, and silk wound with pieces of peacocks' feathers

1 Basic weave with one set of warps and one set of wefts, in which the odd warps pass over a given weft and the even warps pass under it; vice versa on the next weft, and so forth.

2 Called rinzu by the Japanese, literally "thread" or "string" and probably referring to the patterning. Produced in damask or damasklike weave probably introduced by Chinese weavers who set up looms at Sakai in the Ming period (1368-1644). In discussing these robes here, I have included both damask and damasklike weaves under the term damask because of their similar appearance. But both are present in the rinzu and in other freer allover ground patterns of flowers, birds, and so forth without the fret characteristic of rinzu. True damask is reversible in both weave structure and pattern. One set of warps and wefts interface to form a fabric with the pattern in one weave and the ground in another, usually tabby and satin. On the reverse of the fabric, the pattern appears in satin, and the ground in tabby. A damasklike weave is also formed by a single set of warps and wefts, the pattern being of one weave and the ground of another, but the weave is not reversible in a structural sense and may comprise a much greater variety of weaves than the true damask.

3 According to Mr. Shizuo Nomura, Chinese silks used in Japanese robes are distinguished from Japanese silks for the same purpose by their greater breadth. A robe of Chinese silk (S.L.59.195) requires half a breadth in each sleeve, while a robe of Japanese silk is made with one breadth in each sleeve.

DOCUMENTATION

An unpublished history of Japanese costume, written some years ago by Helen Benton Minnich in collaboration with the late Shojiro Nomura, has been freely consulted and occasionally paraphrased during the preparation of this article, as has Japan, A Cultural History, by G. B. Sansom (New York, 1931). "Artist Designers of the Tokugawa Period," by Pauline Simmons in The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin, February, 1956, furnishes interesting sidelights on these robes. Additional historical and technical information may also be found in Japanese Costume, by Alan Priest (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1935); Textile Designs of Japan, I, (Japan Textile Color Design Center, Osaka, 1959).
LEFT: Detail of an early eighteenth-century robe in patterned tabby with garden motifs. RIGHT: Detail of a mid-Tokugawa robe expressing the essence of autumn.