



"Furusode" (kimono with long sleeves) Plum trees, standing screens, and falcon design on whitey brown chirimeno crepe ground
Edo period/18th century

Yuzenzome, dyeing technique popular from the end of the 17th century to the first half of the 18th century. This groundbreaking technique allowed dyers to create designs that look like paintings.

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

"Furusode" (Kimono with Long Sleeves) Plum Trees, Standing Screens, and Falcon Design on Whitey Brown Chirimeno Crepe Ground

The kimono is more than a garment; it is a symbol of traditional Japanese culture. The kimono originated in the Edo period (early 17th century to mid-late 19th century) along with its companions, the short-sleeved *kosode* and the long-sleeved *furusode* robes. This article introduces a selection from the Tokyo National Museum's collection of outstanding examples of *furusode* worn by young men and women in the Edo period.

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The pattern represents the daring hawk bred for *takagari*,¹ the noble sport of falconry, a traditional Japanese pastime. The Japanese Imperial Court came to hold falconry displays in the Heian period (794 - end of the 12th century). Starting in the Kamakura period (late 12th century - 1333), the sport was practiced among the *busho*, Japanese military commanders, and falconry was well-known as a particular favorite of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the first shogun of the Edo Shogunate. It was during the Edo period that the culture of falconry developed into a way of life for the samurai, and *kayozu*² images of hawks, like the one adorning this robe, were common.

The majestic hawk depicted on this *furusode* looks as if it were painted, though the colors used—red, blue, green, yellow, purple, and other intense colors—do not have the realities reflecting an actual hawk. A closer look also shows the pattern with an extremely delicate gradation is outlined in white, and that outline is actually a thin line which is not dyed. The falcon looks like a painting, but it is dyed using a sophisticated dyeing technique called Yuzenzome, which has developed uniquely in Japan. The extremely thin white outline is drawn on with glutinous rice glue, which acts as a barrier to prevent the dye from bleeding beyond the outline when applied. (See photos captioned "Yuzenzome Process.") This technique creates clear, vibrant contours and makes it possible to dye various patterns. In addition, the glue is washed off with water after dyeing, and the traces become the white contour lines.

This glamorous robe, a *furusode* dyed with the full-body image of a hawk perched on a *tsuitate* (a portable partition traditionally used in Japan as a screen), features sleeves that are a full 70cm. Originally worn by young unmarried men and women, *furusode* sleeves



Takazu Byobu (“Depiction of Hawks on Folding Screen”)
Muromachi period/16th century
Six-panel folding screen
Donated by Okazaki Masaya

From the Kamakura period (1185–1333), *takagari* (falconry) came to be practiced among the samurai class, with falconers raising and training hawks for the sport.

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



“Furisode” (kimono with long sleeves)
Plum trees, standing screens, and falcon design on white brown chirimen crepe ground (Back)
Edo period/18th century

Dyed with four colors—red, blue, yellow, and black. These four were mixed in a variety of ways to create different colors. The white outline drawn in glue and the delicate blurring of the brush and brushstrokes are distinctive features of Yuzenzome dyeing.



Yuzenzome Process, Step 1:
Iwama Susumu, a Tokyo-based hand-drawn Yuzenzome artist, draws a thin thread of glue on the fabric to outline the pattern. Japanese *washi* paper coated with persimmon juice is rolled into a cone shape, and a thin layer of glue is squeezed from the tip to outline the pattern. This process requires highly skilled craftsmanship.

Yuzenzome Process, Step 2:
After the glue is applied to the fabric, Iwama creates the colors by filling in the outlined sections with dye. The glue outlines prevent colors from bleeding beyond the contours when the dyes are applied with a *hake* or *fude* brush. This technique also makes it possible to use delicate gradients in dyeing.



Ogura Sansozu (“Allusion to Great Medieval Waka Poet, Fujiwara no Teika’s Cottage at Mount Ogura in Kyoto” (Tokyo National Museum collection), by Okumura Masanobu depicts *wakashu* dressed in *furisode*.

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

gradually grew in length from the mid-to late-Edo period. Kimono patterns at the time held unspoken meaning, hinting at the traits of the person who wore them. In *Hinagata Miyako Fuzoku* (“Rare and Popular Kimono Patterns of the Capitol”),³ an illustrated book of *kosode* patterns rendered in woodblock printing that was published in 1716, a *furisode* with a hawk pattern is included in the section on men’s fashion. At first glance, the pattern is gorgeous enough for a woman’s kimono, but the falconry motif favored by *samurai* warriors

is rather more appropriate for men. Moreover, if you connect the depictions on the *tsuitate* screens on which the hawks perch, a fresh and youthful image emerges from the hem of the garment – a snow-covered plum tree that has endured the cold to blossom. *Hatsuume* (early-blooming plums) were a metaphor for *wakashu*⁵ (adolescent boys) as noted in *Nanshoku Ookagami* (“The specialized book of Male Love”)⁴ by Ihara Saikaku. That adolescent boys were considered suitable objects of affection of older men is a known part

of Edo period culture in Japan. Dress was an important matter in youth, and fashionable patterns designed especially for them were often featured in *hinagata* books. This *furisode* would have been worn by a boy between the ages of 15 and 18 and would have been a thing of great beauty.

A video introducing Yuzenzome dyeing is available on the Tokyo National Museum YouTube channel.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MsZRmOQ3k1o>

1. A type of hunting in which domesticated and trained hawks and peregrine falcons are released into mountains and fields to catch wild birds and small mammals.
2. Depictions of hawks resting their wings on a *hoko*, a wooden screen perch for resting during falconry. This *furisode* depicts a *tsuitate* house screen rather than a *hoko* falconry perch.
3. A *hinagata-bon* of design samples from the time, published as a booklet printed from woodblocks. These books would have been read as modern fashion magazines are today.
4. Ihara Saikaku (1642–1693), one of the leading literary figures of the Edo period. Published in 1687, *Nanshoku Ookagami* (“The specialized book of Male Love”) contains 40 stores of male love featuring *wakashu* (adolescent boys) from samurai families and kabuki actors.
5. Young kabuki actors were called *wakashu*. In addition to performing on stage, they were also romantic partners for men at the time.