

***A Tribute to Miss Lucy: Japanese Kesa from the Aldrich Collection,***

November 1, 2002-February 1, 2003

Continuing our celebration of "Miss Lucy," this exhibition features a small selection of the Japanese Buddhist vestments that Lucy Truman Aldrich gave to RISD in 1935 and 1955.

Buddhism and its tradition of vestments originated in India and gradually reached Japan through Central Asia, China, and Korea. The main vestment, called a *kesa* in Japanese, is usually a rectangular patchwork made up of many pieces sewn together in a columnar configuration. It is most frequently worn over the left shoulder.

*Kesa* are divided into three levels of formality, increasing with the number of their columns. The illustration shows the parts of a *kesa*: columns, internal framework, border, and corner squares. Often inner squares that flank the central column are also included. In many *kesa* the patchwork quality is subverted and the integrity of the textile's pattern is maintained instead; this is especially true of *kesa* made from textiles with large continuous pictorial patterns.

*Kesa* are sometimes likened to *mandalas* (representations of the Buddhist cosmos) with the central column identified as a Buddha and the four corner patches representing the guardians of the four directions. The earliest *kesa* preserved in Japan were assembled from small irregularly shaped pieces of cloth that seem like discarded rags, but later examples are frequently made of luxury textiles, brilliantly colored and patterned with gold threads. Ink inscriptions on their linings often reveal that *kesa* were given to temples in memory of deceased relatives. Occasionally *kesa* were made from donated garments.

Miss Lucy's gifts also included accessory vestments such as stoles, cloths for seated meditation, and decorative cords for *kesa*, some of which are also shown here.

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## CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Japanese  
*Shutara*, 1786-1838  
Silk; metallic yarn  
Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 35.522

*Shutara* are ornamented cords that decorate *kesa*. At the birth of Buddhism in India, cords were not used for fastening monks' garments, nor do they occur in Buddhist vestments in South and Southeast Asian nations even today. Cords are part of the northern lineage of Buddhism that went from Central Asia to China, Korea, and Japan. Cords are first seen fastening *kesa* in fifth-century Northern Wei sculptures. *Shutara* were in use in China during the Tang dynasty (618-907), and in Japan, the Toji temple collection has a *kesa* with *shutara* that belonged to Kobo Daishi (774-835), a revered early Japanese Buddhist leader who founded the Shingon esoteric sect in Japan.



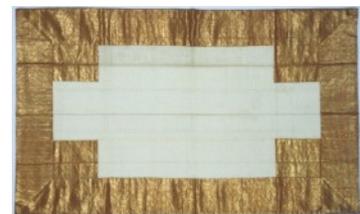
Japanese  
*Kesa*, 1680-1786  
Silk; metallic yarn  
Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 35.283A

This *kesa*'s four corner squares (*shiten*) feature the guardians of the four quarters (north, south, east, west), also called *shiten*. The patches clearly indicate the *kesa*'s function as a representation of the Buddhist cosmos. The central column stands for the Buddha, and the corner squares represent the four guardian kings. The textile from which this *kesa* was made resembles textiles used for Nō theatrical costumes.



Japanese  
*Zagu*, 1750-1850  
Silk compound weave with gilt paper  
Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 35.309B

This sumptuous *kesa* with nine columns was meant for formal occasions. The textile is extraordinarily rich, with both the cloud pattern and its background in gold, and only outlines and details of the clouds delineated in red. Textiles of this type first entered Japan from China during the middle ages.



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The matching cloth with its white center is a *zagu*, meant for seated meditation or sleeping. Generally speaking, *zagu* are among the accoutrements of monks belonging to groups that do not wear *ohi* stoles. When not in use, the *zagu* is worn over the shoulder, rather like an *ohi*.

Japanese

*Kesa*, late 1700s-1800s

Silk; gilt paper

Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 35.327

This unremarkable *kesa* offers remarkable proof that textiles were sometimes woven expressly for *kesa*. The usual loom width of Japanese textiles was about 13 inches, requiring the four long pieces of the *kesa*'s border to be made from lengths of the narrow cloth. Normally, this means that the warp and the pattern of the side borders are perpendicular to the warp and pattern of upper and lower borders. Here, however, the pattern looks uniform throughout the *kesa*. To achieve this, two different green gauze textiles would have had to be made especially for the *kesa*. In the textile used for the side borders, the pattern runs parallel to the warps; and in the textile used for the top and bottom borders, the pattern runs perpendicular to the warps.



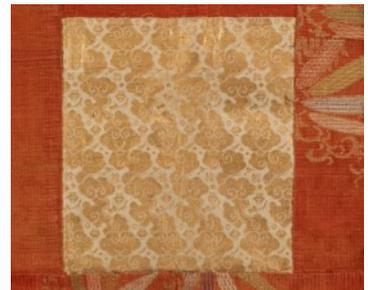
Japanese

*Kesa*, 1680-1786

Silk; gilt paper

Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 35.344A

The textile of this *kesa* may originally have been meant for a Nō theatrical costume. The weave is a gauze called *ro*. When brocaded, *ro* was often used for the Nō theater's gossamer dancing cloaks.



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Japanese  
*Ohi*, 1786-1838  
Silk; gilt paper  
Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 35.376

A *kesa* was usually worn over the left shoulder, and in many Buddhist sects the right shoulder was covered by a stole called an *ohi*. The luxurious Japanese textile of this *ohi* features gold and blue dragon roundels inspired by Chinese designs.



Japanese  
*Ohi*, 1680-1786  
Silk; gilt paper  
Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 35.377

Both the pattern and weave of this textile are quintessentially Japanese. The theme of autumn grasses -- here including pinks, bush clover, chrysanthemums, Chinese bellflowers, and cockscomb -- has been favored for centuries in both literature and the visual arts. The weave, a brocaded twill with extremely long floating wefts that resemble embroidery, is called *karaori* and is characteristic of Nō costumes of the same name.



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Japanese  
*Kesa*, 1800s  
Silk; metallic thread  
Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 35.272A

This is the only *kesa* among Lucy Truman Aldrich's gifts to the Museum that is tapestry-woven. The pictorial design is a landscape of tree peonies, rocks, and waves with birds and a heavenly being in flight among clouds. Woven in a single piece, the *kesa*'s corner and inner squares are included in the tapestry, and its seven columns, border, and internal framework are delineated by the application of green cord.



Japanese  
*Shutara*, 1786-1838  
Silk; metallic yarn  
Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 35.521

*Shutara* are ornamented cords that decorate *kesa*. At the birth of Buddhism in India, cords were not used for fastening monks' garments, nor do they occur in Buddhist vestments in South and Southeast Asian nations even today. Cords are part of the northern lineage of Buddhism that went from Central Asia to China, Korea, and Japan. Cords are first seen fastening *kesa* in fifth-century Northern Wei sculptures. *Shutara* were in use in China during the Tang dynasty (618-907), and in Japan, the Toji temple collection has a *kesa* with *shutara* that belonged to Kobo Daishi (774-835), a revered early Japanese Buddhist leader who founded the Shingon esoteric sect in Japan.



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Japanese  
*Kesa*, 1786-1838  
Silk; gilt paper  
Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 35.338

The vast majority of *kesa* in American museum collections have seven columns. This one has five and was worn for less formal occasions. The textile from which the *kesa* was made shows a strong Chinese influence or may even have been imported from China. It features small four-clawed dragons among multicolored clouds and auspicious symbols, all heightened with glimmers of metallic thread.



Japanese; Edo  
*Semi-formal Buddhist vestment (7-column kesa)*, 1800-1850s  
Silk, gilt mulberry paper; compound weave, supplementary weft  
patterning  
Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.397

Although stitched into the traditional columnar configuration, this *kesa* does not seem like a patchwork because the cloth's pictorial design is not interrupted. The multicolored garden setting includes a peacock, a pheasant, tree peonies, and rocks on a red background. The corner patches (*shiten*) and inner patches have white grounds instead of red. Notice the peacock's tail, which continues on both red ground and white through one of the inner squares.



Japanese  
*Kesa*, 1680-1786  
Silk twill weave with gilt paper  
Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.402

Golden floral patterns dominated by scrolling lotuses are common on *kesa*. Such patterns are often seen on dark-blue grounds in Ming dynasty (1368-1644) Chinese textiles that the Japanese imported and treasured; however, this example is Japanese and later in date. The *kesa*'s lining is inscribed in ink and explains that a mother gave this *kesa* to a temple in 1859 in remembrance of her deceased daughter.



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Japanese

*Buddhist Priest's Mantle (Kesa)*, 1786-1838

Silk and gilt paper

Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.406

The *kesa* lining shown here incorporates portions of a woman's kimono. Garments were often given to Buddhist temples in memory of deceased persons. There, they were disassembled and became part of the temples' patchwork vestments or altar cloths. The kimono from which this cloth came had a pattern of small-scale landscapes; but, judging from the panels in this lining, the kimono included extensive unpatterned portions, a combination that was fashionable in the late 18th and 19th century.



Japanese

*Seven-column priest's robe with court-dance theme*, 1736

Silk compound weave with supplementary silk and gold-leaf paper  
patterning wefts

Bequest of Lucy T. Aldrich 55.408

This *kesa*'s pictorial pattern continues uninterrupted across the boundaries of its columnar form. Against a golden curtain background are scattered various musical instruments: among them, a mouth organ (*sho*) and pipes (*hichiriki*) at the upper left, large and small drums, and a zither (*koto*) that stretches across the bottom of the *kesa*. Above the center of the zither is a hat, and slightly to the left is a mask with a dangling jaw. All these objects have been used for centuries in the performance of Japanese court dance (*bugaku*), which survives today.



Japanese

*Kesa*, 1680-1786

Silk; gilt paper; metallic wrapped yarn

Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.419

According to early Buddhist traditions in both China and Japan, the emperor sometimes granted to favored monks the honor of wearing purple, a color usually associated with high courtly ranks. Purple gradually became associated with higher ranks of the clergy also. This sumptuously patterned *kesa* might have been worn by a high-ranking



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monk. Note that the kesa looks like a patchwork. No attempt was made to preserve the repeat of the woven design.

Japanese  
*Ohi*, 1780-1838  
Silk; gilt paper  
Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.445

Things Chinese were often revered in Japan, especially in Buddhist circles, and yet the design of this textile seems quite playful and not at all reverent. The pattern's fanciful adaptations of Chinese bronze vessel shapes and scholars' objects appear ready to scamper across the cloth.



Japanese  
*Shutara*, 1786-1838  
Silk; metallic yarn  
Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 35.516

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