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The Doll's House Museum Basel presents:

Children's kimonos

Special exhibition from 16.10.2010 until 03.04.2011

This unique special exhibition on children's kimonos exclusively features items from the remarkable Nakano Kazuko collection from Yamagata in northern Japan. This is the first time that these items are on public display, and this is the first exhibition in Europe to be exclusively devoted to the subject of children's kimonos. All of the more than 90 children's kimonos originate from the Japanese Edo (1603–1867), Meiji (1868–1912), Taishô (1912–1926) and Shôwa (1926–1989) periods. They are complemented by other objects such as children's bags, "obi" (belts), "geta" (traditional Japanese wooden shoes), Japanese dolls, old illustrations and photos of children in kimonos, and much more.

History of the kimono

In today's cultural consciousness of Japan and other countries, the kimono is still regarded as a symbol of Japanese tradition. The history of the Japanese gown began with the introduction of Buddhism in 552 AD. Buddhist monks from Korea presented the Japanese emperor Kinmei with a statue of Buddha, on behalf of the Korean king. They introduced not only Chinese writing to Japan, but also the highly developed culture of the mainland, which pervaded all aspects of life. The original Japanese religion, Shinto, was given its name in the 6th century, derived from Chinese "shen dao" (way of the gods), so as to separate their own religious traditions from Buddhism.

The "kosode", the forerunner of the kimono, originally served as an undergarment below the various layers of clothing worn by court ladies during the Heian period (794–1185). In the following Kamakura period (1185–1333), women from warrior families wore the "kosode" as

an outer garment in combination with a trouser-style undergarment called “hakama”. From the Momoyama period (1568–1600) onwards, the “kosode” served as an outer garment for men and women of all social classes. The differences in social hierarchy were demonstrated by the different types of fabrics and patterns used for making kimonos. In general, the gowns for the wealthier families were made of luxurious fabrics and involved extensive work and effort, while common citizens wove and decorated their clothes using more easily obtainable, cheaper materials. The farmers wore gowns with tight-fitting, pipe-shaped sleeves made from hardwearing and inexpensive fabrics which offered more freedom of movement.

During the Edo period (1603-1867), the four-class system was introduced by the Tokugawas, the ruling family at the time: The Samurai positioned themselves at the top of the social order, followed by the farmers; the craftsmen came third while the merchants occupied the lowest social rung.

In 1868 the Tokugawas’ military regime collapsed and a “more civilised and enlightened” Japanese society was called for by the bureaucrats of the new Meiji government (1868–1912). Endeavouring to position themselves on an equal level with Western nations, Japanese civil servants began to wear Western clothes, which were fundamentally different from Japanese garments. As early as 1872, only four years after the official transition to a central government with the Emperor as the leader of the nation, the Meiji Emperor could be seen for the first time in a Western uniform.

Against this political background, the kimono began to lose its original meaning as a symbol of social status or profession and increasingly came to be seen as the national costume of Japan.

The style of the kimono has remained unchanged over the centuries, with only the surface of the fabric reflecting the general spirit of the times: There were European influences as well.

The Japanese view the kimono as a work of art, to be presented like a painting. This is what makes kimonos such valuable and coveted collectors’ items which are admired at exhibitions all over the world. Today, wearing a kimono documents the close bonds with nine centuries of Japanese culture and tradition.

Styles and manufacture of kimonos

The word “kimono” is an abbreviation of “kirumono”. “Kiru” is Japanese for “to wear” and “mono” literally means “object”. “Kirumono”, shortened to “kimono”, thus means **an object to wear**.

The kimono is a caftan-like, ankle-length piece of clothing without buttons or other fasteners, which is merely tied around the waist with a wide belt or sash called “obi”. The history of the kimono is thousands of years old. There are kimonos for men, for women and for children in a wide variety of styles, each one with its own specific meaning attached to it. They relate to social status, age, marital status and social position, among others.

Originally, the word “kimono” referred to all sorts of garments. The kimono as it is known today began to take shape in the Heian period (794–1185). Since that time, the basic style of the kimono for men, as well as women, has remained largely unchanged.

The simple, T-shaped kimono is made from one single bolt of fabric, which is cut into seven pieces. This makes it easy to undo and use anew. Consisting of two body pieces, two arm pieces and two front pieces as well as a collar, the kimono is knit together using a minimal amount of tailoring and straight seams. If an adult-sized kimono becomes worn or the owner no longer likes the colour or design or arm length, the kimono can be taken apart and easily altered into a children’s garment. In the same way fragments of adults’ clothing and parts of

other gowns were reused and combined to create a new look for a children's kimono or to make a valuable piece of clothing for the child from garments which other members of the family had worn. Irrespective of gender, the robe is wrapped around the body, always with the left side wrapped over the right side. The kimono is held together by a sash-like belt called "obi", which is tied in a knot at the back. Over time, there were many variations in colour, fabric and style, also with regard to accessories such as the "obi".

There are kimonos for every kind of occasion, with styles ranging from extremely formal to highly casual. Kimonos also differ according to age, marital status as well as social status. Women's kimonos are defined by their style, pattern, fabric and colour. Of particular significance is the length of the sleeve. Men's kimonos are generally made in the same style but are usually worn in darker colours. The type and colour of the accessories, the fabric, as well as the family coat(s) of arms called "mon" or, conversely, the lack of these features, define how formal a kimono is. Silk is considered the most formal fabric, cotton is more casual.

Kimonos are made from one single bolt of fabric. These bolts have standard dimensions and the entire bolt of fabric, which is 13 m long and 40 cm wide, is used and sewn together to make the kimono. Colour, material and pattern vary according to marital status, social status, age and the season. Basically, there is one single size for kimonos, irrespective of gender, height or girth. This standard size is derived from the average body measurements of a Japanese person. It is therefore very difficult and exceptionally expensive to find larger kimonos.

Kimonos come in silk, wool, cotton, linen and synthetic materials. A formal kimono is usually made from high-quality silk. Woollen kimonos are mostly worn in winter; in the warmer seasons, kimonos made of cotton or linen are preferred. Kimonos made of synthetic materials have become very popular because they are easy to look after as well as being cheaper.

Hand-sewn kimonos are sewn with loose stitches. This made it possible to take apart kimonos and wash the soiled parts only.

Dyeing techniques

As early as the 17th century, the "**yûzen**" dyeing technique facilitated the development of design in Japan. This technique involves both dyeing and printing processes which are interspersed with painting in countless work steps. The patterns are created using rice paste to cover the area, followed by the application of the juice of the "tsuyukusa" flower, a pale blue liquid, to dye the fabric. Motifs are then printed in various colours using stencils. Each motif is coloured by hand, often using subtle shading, then covered with a layer of paste to preserve it. In the final step, the entire fabric is dyed in one base colour and, after steaming and washing, the intricately painted motifs emerge.

Using the "**shibori**" dyeing technique, often known as tie-dyeing or more precisely as "shaped resist dyeing", allowed a wide variety of innovative designs to develop in the 12th to 14th centuries. Here, the fabric is shaped by folding, twisting, stitching or binding smaller or larger pieces of the fabric. This prevents the dye from penetrating the fabric texture during the dyeing process. Features of textiles which were made using the "shibori" process include the structured surface of clothes and the soft, blurred edges of the individual motifs. The "shibori" technique has been used in Japan since the 8th century. There are a small number of raw materials – cloth, dyeing bath and binding material – all of which are easy to obtain and hence accessible to all segments of the population.

“Kasuri” is a reserve technique (the dye is not taken up) in which the warp and weft are patterned by binding and bleeding them. In rural regions it served as a means of generating additional income during the seasons when no agricultural products could be grown. In the first step of the “kasuri” procedure, weaving yarns are partly “reserved” (bound to resist the dye) by various processes and then dyed; in the second step they are woven together. The precisely calculated reserves thereby make up the characteristic motifs. Either the warp or the weft or both together can be made up of the reserved yarn. The threads of cotton or bast fibres are dipped into an indigo dye bath in which the bound fibres remain white. Using a comparatively small input of materials, namely thread, indigo and a simple loom, an endless variety of designs can be created with relatively simple weaving skills.

History of the children’s kimono

In Japan, the culture of clothing has an important place and has reached a high level of sophistication. For more than a thousand years there has been a great predilection for children’s clothing. This is attested to by kimonos from the 16th and 17th centuries made for children from noble families and preserved to this day in Shinto shrines or Buddhist temples.

At a time when the life of a child was often short, the family, and above all the mother, transferred all the love and care for their offspring into their clothing, which she either ordered or sewed herself.

Although children’s kimonos are made from similar fabric to those of adults, they do differ in their shape and decoration from the classic T-shaped kimono. Adults used the features of children’s kimonos to highlight their age, status and even regional or national identity, and they dressed their children according to the expectations that they harboured for them.

The designs which are painted, dyed or stitched onto children’s kimonos are full of meaning. Auspicious motifs such as the combination of pine, bamboo and plums represented the wish for good health, luck and wealth. Also pairs of cranes and tortoises, with their promise of longevity, can often be found on children’s kimonos, along with gender-specific designs for boys such as falcons, horses, carp, helmets and armour. Designs for girls include an abundance of flowers in a cart or a basket, images of courtly games and customs, decorated balls or allusions to literature. Most of these designs were derived from the activities and patterns which were favoured by the aristocrats of the Heian period, the classical period in Japanese history.

Already in the middle of the 1880s, children began to be dressed in Western clothing when Western school uniforms for boys and a select group of girls who attended mission schools were introduced. Paper dolls with Western clothing also made the Japanese children aware of this new style of attire. By the 1920s, most children in urban schools had already experienced Western uniforms at first hand.

Up until the Second World War, children’s kimonos were still being produced for daily wear. This usually meant that adults’ kimonos were retailed to fit. Even when they were specifically made for children, easily obtainable and durable cotton materials were mainly used. Many of the extant kimonos of this type are dyed indigo employing the “kasuri” or “shibori” techniques. Today, as in days gone by, parents still clothe their children in ceremonial kimonos made of silk. In everyday life, however, Japanese children wear the same clothes as children anywhere else in the world. This makes the surviving children’s kimonos even more valuable.

Sizes and special features of children's kimonos

"Tan" is the measuring unit for the amount of cloth required to make an adult-sized kimono. A "tan" is about 12 m long and 36–38 cm wide. Roughly speaking, kimonos come in the sizes "odachi" for adults and "kodachi" for children.

There are specific children's kimonos for the various age groups. There are those for newborns, called "ubugi", or "hitotsumi" for babies up to two years of age. A small child's very first festive gown is worn for his/her first visit to a Shinto shrine. The gown is relatively long and can therefore also be worn by an older child. It is wrapped around the baby. Either the mother or the grandmother fastens the ties of the gown around the neck and shoulders. Often magnificent fabrics, dyed using the "yûzen" technique, were used to make these impressive kimonos.

A kimono for a newborn is called "**hyakusesu-dogi**" or "**hyakutoku-kimono**". It is sewn together from many small pieces of fabric that have come from "blessed people", that is people either of ripe old age or with many healthy children. Small pieces of fabric carried great significance, something which can scarcely be imagined any more in our consumer and throwaway society.

"Hitotsumi"

The "hitotsumi", literally "body", is worn by babies up to two years of age. The term is derived from the body section of the kimono. The back section consists of a single piece of fabric without a back seam. This seamless back section is often decorated with a "semamori" (see below). To make a "hitotsumi" you need a "no", which is about 38 cm, of fabric. About a third of a "tan" is needed to sew it together.

"Mitsumi"

The "mitsumi" is worn by three- and four-year-old children. It already has a seam at the back. The term comes from the fact that to make a "mitsumi", three times the length of a "mitake" (length of the kimono measured from the collar) is needed. This is equivalent to between four and five metres.

"Yotsumi"

Children from five to twelve years of age wear these kimonos until they are grown up. There is a ritual called "jusan mairi" exclusively for girls, during which 13-year-old girls visit a shrine to definitively enter adulthood.

Some special features of children's kimonos:

"Tsukehimo"

Small children have their kimonos bound together with a special cord instead of the "obi" sash so that they can move more easily. This cord is 5 to 8 cm wide and 70 to 90 cm long. At festivities it is mostly made out of the same fabric as the kimono. The cord is sewn onto the collar of the child's kimono. This decoration is called "himokazari" and also serves as a fastener.

"Kataage" and "koshiage"

A tuck-in on the shoulder, or "kataage", and a dart on the hip, or "koshiage", are common features on children's kimonos. This "age" (pleat) makes it possible to easily undo the child's kimono and tailor it to fit as the child grows. A pleated children's kimono makes the child look very nice. The kimono is cut and sewn in a straight line. The pleats provide freedom of movement.

“Semamori”

This is the name of the motif stitched onto the back of children’s kimonos. In Japan it is believed that a seam in a piece of clothing has the power to keep away evil spirits. Because there were no seams at the back of a newborn’s “ubugi” gown or on the “hitotsumi” gown for one- and two-year-old children, the “semamori” décor was sewn on. Twelve straight stitches were intended to confirm the desire for the child to safely reach the age of twelve months. Complex three-dimensional patterns or relief-type fabric pictures such as crests, or “semon”, were also used.

To which festivities do children wear a kimono?

Traditionally, the Japanese believed that the soul of a child was closer to the gods than that of an adult. On the other hand, during their first seven years of life, children were thought to be more susceptible to illnesses and the influence of evil spirits, which was why they needed special protection.

The first visit to the shrine, or “omiyamairi”, is the first important ceremony on the path to growing up. This ceremony takes place about 30 days – generally 31 days for boys and 33 days for girls – following birth. The entire family pays their respects to the shrine to express their gratitude that the child has survived his/her first month of life.

The local Shinto shrine is visited on 15th November, the day of “shichi-go-san” (7, 5, 3). For this ceremony, three- and seven-year-old girls and, respectively, five-year-old boys are taken to the shrine in festive clothing where a prayer for their health and wealth is said. It is customary for three-year-old girls to have their hair styled for the first time. Five-year-old boys now wear a kimono together with a “hakama” (formal Japanese trousers). Seven-year-old girls celebrate their path towards adulthood by having the cords fastening their kimono replaced with the “obi” sash.

In addition to the ceremonies already mentioned, children may also wear kimonos to the annual festivals. The five most significant festivals can easily be remembered by the single-digit, odd numbers of the month and day. New Year, or “oshōgatsu” in Japanese, is celebrated on the first day of the first month (1/1). The children are given money in small decorated envelopes. Generally, the girls also receive a badminton racket, “hagoita”, and the boys a miniature quiver with bow and arrows, “hamayumi”.

The girls’ festival, also known as “hinamatsuri”, is celebrated on the third day of the third month (3/3). On this day, dolls which represent the Emperor and Empress or their attendants with imperial insignia of the Heian court are set up on a red-covered, tiered platform. These valuable dolls are said to have the power to stop and drive away evil spirits.

The boys’ festival “tango no sekku” with the traditional carp streamers is celebrated on the fifth day of the fifth month (5/5). The carp swimming against the current represent strength and endurance and are a popular motif on boys’ clothing. Families with sons also display the traditional Japanese warrior helmet and a doll of Kintarō, a legendary boy who was famous as a child for his strength and courage.

The star festival, or “tanabata”, on the day on which the Weaver Star and the Cowherd Star unite, is celebrated on the seventh day of the seventh month (7/7). Young and old gather together to marvel at the stars and firework displays.

The festival which has been forgotten the most is the chrysanthemum festival, or “kiku no sekku”, which is traditionally celebrated on the ninth day of the ninth month (9/9). According to Chinese legend, Taoist wise men lived on a diet of chrysanthemums. That is why the flower became associated with longevity. Since the Meiji period, the 16-petal chrysanthemum

motif has been a symbol of the imperial family. The flower is also often used in many different ways as a motif on kimonos.

About the collector lending the kimonos on display, Ms Nakano Kazuko

All of the children's kimonos on display come from the collection of Nakano Kazuko. Ms Nakano lives in Yamagata in northern Japan, where the winters are very long. When the peach, cherry and plum blossoms begin to sprout in late spring, everything comes alive again.

Ms. Nakano Kazuko was born in Yamagata in 1935. After high school she followed her mother's recommendation and learned the trade of kimono tailoring, although she would have much preferred to learn how to tailor European clothes. In early 1950, Ms. Nakano won an award at the Yamagata Prefecture Exhibition for her "sashiko" work (Japanese textile decorating technique, the traditional form of Japanese quilting). Still today, Ms. Nakano effortlessly performs the finest stitch work.

Twenty years ago, Ms. Nakano obtained old kimono fabrics for the Ichimatsu dolls which she collected. She used the old fabrics to make kimonos for the dolls. Later, she acquired a licence as an antiques dealer. She visited auctions and flea markets and gradually got to know many dealers; people began to reserve the best items for her more and more often. She won the bid for a child's kimono at an auction and was immediately asked whether she intended to cut it up. Because Ms. Nakano's conscience was pricked by this question, she began to collect children's kimonos – the foundation of her now very comprehensive collection of children's kimonos from the various Japanese periods.

The Nakano Kazuko collection comprises several hundred children's kimonos from the late Edo period up to the start of the 20th century. Ms. Nakano has collected them with the love and care that is shown to children and in the memory of mothers of all time.

Apart from children's kimonos, Ms. Nakano collects everything to do with children, such as hina-ningyo dolls and accessories. This collectors' passion grew out of her love for children, but is also nurtured by the loving memory of her own mother, who died at a young age. Included in the collection are luxurious, precious, dyed children's kimonos from rich households but also some from less wealthy families who, in spite of many restrictions such as prohibitions or bad harvests, made a great effort to give their children festive kimonos. The collection also includes kimonos for newborns such as the "yuage" (clothing for after bathing), "mustuki" (first kimono after birth), "ubugi" (kimonos for newborns) up to kimonos for thirteen-year-olds.

Much can be learned about the culture of life from Ms. Nakano's collection, in contrast to collections of adults' kimonos, which are mostly displayed in museums for the dyeing techniques involved.

Kimonos for children handed down from those past times are mostly worn-out and often dirty so that collectible specimens are few and far between. The children's kimonos in the Nakano collection, however, are not only beautiful and colourful but also exceptionally well preserved. They are a wonderful testament to the great love of parents for their children.

Information about the Nakano Kazuko collection

With the arrival of long-awaited spring, great celebrations are held for the dolls' and girls' festival "hina-matsuri" in Yamagata. Up until the end of the Edo period in the middle of the 19th century, Yamagata was one of the largest areas where the "benibana" (safflower) was cultivated, the flower from which red dye was obtained in Japan. This red dye was transported to Kyoto by "kitamae-bune", a merchant ship travelling the Japanese Sea. The ship then returned to Yamagata with hina-ningyo dolls. The people loved these dolls because they were dressed in red kimonos. Although the people of Yamagata cultivated the "benibana", they could not afford the very expensive kimonos which had been dyed red with safflower pigment. This was all the more reason to love the hina-ningyo dolls, a love which was reinforced because, as the very first festival in spring, the dolls' festival marked the end of the hard winter.

Due to the particularly harsh climate, a very high level of infant mortality was recorded in this region. And so it was that the girls in their festive kimonos were the great pride and joy of their mothers at the "hina-matsuri" girls' festival.

The festive kimonos in the collection are mainly decorated with traditional auspicious patterns such as "shochikubai" (pine/bamboo/plum tree) and "tsurukame" (crane/tortoise). Both are symbols of longevity. This was the foremost wish that parents had for their children at a time when infant mortality was very high due to poor nutrition and lack of medical care.

Alongside patterns relating to nature, which are frequently seen on adults' kimonos, girls' kimonos very often feature representations of wishes for a good marriage or many children. Boys' kimonos are adorned with representations of wishes for courage, success and wealth. It is very characteristic for children's kimonos to have a "senui", a seam in the middle of the back, or a "semamori", an amulet sewn onto the back. It was believed that a seam kept away evil spirits. As kimonos for two- and three-year-olds did not have a seam down the back because the width of the back corresponded to the width of the bolt of fabric, a row of stitches were sewn down the middle of the back as a false seam so that the child would be protected from evil spirits. Also the amulet with its auspicious motifs such as cranes, tortoises, plums and bamboo was thought of as providing protection from evil spirits and symbolised the good wishes for a life marked by health, wealth and success.

The colours and patterns of children's kimonos are often very similar to those of adults' kimonos. This was also to protect the children: It was believed that if children looked like adults in such kimonos the evil spirits would not recognise them as children. Special braiding and braiding decorations are also characteristic of children's kimonos.

Kimonos today

Kimonos were, and still are, generally very expensive. Depending on the quality, the price of a kimono can range from less than CHF 100 up to more than CHF 10,000. They may be hand-sewn, and the fabrics which are used may also be handmade and lavishly decorated. A complete outfit, that is kimono, under-gown, "obi" sash, cords, socks, sandals and accessories, can cost more than CHF 20,000. Even one single "obi" for a women's kimono can cost several thousand Swiss francs.

Kimonos are never thrown away. Old kimonos can be reused in a number of different ways. They can be made into "haoris" or children's kimonos. Their material can also be used to mend similar-looking kimonos, or to make kimono accessories, such as handbags, bags or cases to store various utensils.

Today, kimonos are primarily worn on special occasions and mostly by women. Men wear kimonos to weddings and tea ceremonies but also for certain types of sport such as kendo.

These days, the tradition of wearing kimonos is arousing great interest in Japan. Classes relating to the subject are held as well. Such courses teach which type of kimono should be worn in which season and on which occasion, with which fabric and pattern, which undergarments and accessories are suitable to go along with them, which “obi” should be chosen and how it is tied, and so on.

As it is very complicated to correctly put on a woman’s kimono with all the proper accessories, there continue to be professional kimono dressers who can be hired particularly to assist on special occasions.

There are still a good number of older women and a smaller percentage of men who wear a kimono daily. Professional sumo wrestlers are required to wear a kimono outside of the ring when they make a public appearance.

The special ceremony “seijin no hi” takes place in January of the year in which a young person reaches the age of 20. This ceremony signals the transition from childhood to adulthood. Parents customarily dress their daughters in a “furisode” for this ceremony, a kimono with long, fluttering sleeves which also used to represent the wealth of a family. Boys wear a “hakama” (formal Japanese trousers).

These days, Japanese women still often wear a kimono on formal and festive occasions. Correct attire includes an under-gown, “tabi” cloth socks, “geta” wooden shoes or sandals made of “zori” wickerwork, and a fan. The elaborate wedding kimonos with accessories are generally rented.

Slideshow and films

In the slideshow accompanying the exhibition, you can see children in traditional Japanese clothing, that is to say: wearing a kimono. They are pictures of our times. This is intended to illustrate that the kimono continues to be of relevance in Japan. This classical piece of clothing has a very long tradition, representing, among other things, the festive dress for children. As in days gone by, many parents still clothe their children in kimonos for ceremonial occasions. Two films demonstrate how a kimono is correctly put on. It is a complex and quite lengthy procedure. And the hairstyle, too, plays a big role.

Kimono competition

Our kimono competition challenges the creativity and imagination of the participants. The more stylish and original the design of the submitted pattern for a doll’s kimono is, the greater the chance that the audience, acting as the jury, will pick it as the winner of one of the exclusive Japanese prizes.

Workshops

Children from 6 years of age can take part in our free workshops, which will be held on certain weekends from 13.30 to 17.30 in the museum. They will receive expert guidance in making a kimono for their doll. Original kimono fabrics from Japan will be provided for this. Those who would like to fold paper objects can take part in our origami workshop. At the conclusion of the workshop, all the children can take home their little artwork.

Workshop dates

Saturday, 16.10.2010
Sunday, 17.10.2010

Saturday, 30.10.2010
Sunday, 31.10.2010

Saturday, 13.11.2010
Sunday, 14.11.2010

Saturday, 27.11.2010
Sunday, 28.11.2010

Saturday, 11.12.2010
Sunday, 12.12.2010

Saturday, 18.12.2010
Sunday, 19.12.2010

Saturday, 08.01.2011
Sunday, 09.01.2011

Saturday, 29.01.2011
Sunday, 30.01.2011

Saturday, 12.02.2011
Sunday, 13.02.2011

Saturday, 26.02.2011
Sunday, 27.02.11

Saturday, 05.03.2011
Sunday, 06.03.2011

Saturday, 26.03.2011
Sunday, 27.03.2011

Opening hours

Museum, shop and café: daily from 10.00 – 18.00

Admission

CHF 7.00/5.00

Children up to 16 years of age are admitted free of charge and only in the company of adults.

No additional charge for the special exhibition.

The entire building is wheelchair-accessible.

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