

Fig. 2 Bodice of beige silk Oriental-motif printed jumpsuit with short sleeves ca.1970. FRC 1993.06.012. Photograph by author.



JOURNEY OF A JAPANESE JUMPSUIT

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Flanked by giant blue mountains is an ethereal scene of nature. The colours of the lush green hills and the blue and orange trees and flowers are reflected in the river flowing by. A pier with a quaint little house at the end of it overlooks the river as someone in a boat makes their way across the serene waters. The coral-hued clouds and the colourful birds in the sky make the scenery complete.

The vibrantly coloured textile print is the most attractive feature of this 1970s silk jumpsuit housed in the Fashion Research Collection (FRC) at Toronto Metropolitan University (see fig.1). By contrast, the cream-coloured silk fabric and the simple construction of the garment almost act as a blank canvas for the motifs that depict the beautiful scenery described above.

This piece was donated to the FRC by Dr. Karen Mulhallen who is a poet, scholar and long-time English Professor Emerita at Toronto Metropolitan University. Dr. Mulhallen has donated over 100 different intriguing fashion objects and many of them encompass overlying themes of the celebration of cultures and colourful ornamentation. I had the opportunity to read some of her poetry from her newest book "Domestic Love" (Glover) and I could immediately envision a glimpse of the relationship she would have had with this jumpsuit through the intense imagery of nature in her work.

"A fallen bird's egg, broken blue
white stars of snow drops
masses of trilliums dog-toothed yellow
violets pendulous bells, the deep yellow fuzz of dandelions
moss, spikes and fur, acid green softness"

(Mulhallen, *Irondale*, May on the Haliburton Road number 23, No Exit from Domestic Love)

The garment was analyzed using the methodologies developed by Mida and Kim in *The Dress Detective* (2015). Ellen Sampson's theories on entanglement and wear (2020) informed the way I approached and engaged with the signs of embodiment on the garment. The preliminary step that I took to analyze the garment was to observe and make note of all its style and construction features, that I later analyzed to find its various sources of inspiration. The jumpsuit opens in the front at the bodice (see fig.2) and is fastened by two self-fabric buttons. The pants are wide-legged with two patch pockets on the front that are printed with the same repeat that is seen on the bodice as well as the hem of the pants. The short bell sleeves and curved V neckline add to the delicate charm of the garment.



Fig. 1 Beige silk Oriental-motif printed jumpsuit with short sleeves ca. 1970. FRC 1993.06.012. Photograph by author.

In the process of my research, questions about the timeline of the garment arose. There are a number of inferences from the design of the garment as well as Mulhallen's literary work that led me to the conclusion that this jumpsuit may indeed be a vintage piece from somewhere between the 1920s-1950s. This is evident from the design of the garment which is evocative of the beach pajamas which gained popularity in the 1920s and 1930s and the way that Mulhallen describes her relationship with clothing in 'My Life in Clothes & Books, a Memoir' (Cinque Magazine). In the memoir, she writes, that into her first few years of teaching, she began to follow the trend of vintage clothing and often wore her mother's clothes which included 1940s and 1950s coats and outfits from Creed's as well as 1920s and 1930s dresses from London's vintage shops in Chelsea and the Portobello Road markets. She goes on to describe how clothing created a special bond between her and her mother (Mulhallen). This leads me to believe that this jumpsuit that is currently dated as originating in the 1970s could in fact be from several decades earlier representing the initial sparks of modern Japanese design before designers like Issey Miyake and Kenzo Takada entered the global fashion scene (Wetherille).

KYO YUZEN TEXTILES

The printed silk itself has all the qualities of screen-printed textiles and yet hints at the raw intricacies that come with hand-painted textiles. The print with its vibrant depiction of nature and daily life is reminiscent of Kyoto (Kyo) textiles, and more particularly those that have been dyed and hand-painted using traditional practices called Kyo-Yūzen or Kyo-yūzen-zome. ("Kyo Textiles (Kyo Yuzen)- KOGEI JAPAN") The Yūzen dyeing method was established in the Edo Period (1603-1868) in Japan by a traditional fan painter named Yūzensai Miyazaki and the variation of this method practised in Kyoto to dye Kimonos was called Kyo-yūzen (KOGEI JAPAN). This dyeing method is a laborious process consisting of 10 different procedures with various steps including creating a sketch, applying outlines of rice paste resist to the sketch so that the different colours do not bleed into each other, brush dyeing, steaming, straightening the fabric, and finishing with gold glazing and/or embroidery (Furukawa, et al. 278). Kyo-yūzen-zome can be categorized into 5 distinct types based on the method used- hand-drawn: Yūzen, kata Yūzen (which uses a paper stencil), screen printed, machine printed, and inkjet dyeing (278). With the onset of the Industrial Revolution, in the mid-19th century German synthetic dyestuff and weaving/printing machines were imported, accelerating textile production (Okomato 142). The resulting screen-printed and roller-printed fabrics were also called Yūzen dyeing and to distinguish these from the hand-painted versions the latter were called hon-yūzen or real Yūzen (145).

A single fabric label attached to the back of the neckline acts as both a size label indicating a size 14 as well as a care label that reads "To launder use Lux in tepid water. Do not allow to soak overnight. Do not roll in a towel. Hand launder to obtain perfect satisfaction. Never use boiling water for these garments." Unilever's Lux was popularly known to be hand and face soap and special Lux flakes for delicate clothes were introduced in the 1900s (Chambers). These soap flakes were used for delicate clothing and fabrics to maintain its longevity, vibrancy of colours and in this case the softness and sheen of the silk garment.



LEFT Fig. 3 Pongee Silk Fabric, Beige silk Oriental-motif printed jumpsuit with short sleeves ca.1970. FRC 1993.06.012. Photo taken by author

RIGHT Fig. 4 Seam unravelling at trouser. Beige silk Oriental-motif printed jumpsuit with short sleeves ca.1970. FRC 1993.06.012. Photo taken by author



A closer observation of the fabric indicates that it was hand-woven. The simple, low-density weave of the fabric (see fig.3) with visible slubs along the weft are striking markers of the Pongee silk fabric that originates from Shandong, China (Song, et al. 1). Pongee silk is a lightweight, handwoven silk fabric that has a translucent quality to it owing to the low density of warp and weft yarns (Phyllis, et al. 370). While inspecting the construction of the garment, there are some noticeably mismatched seams and unfinished raw edges within the seams. There are two belt loops at the sides of the waist but there is no belt attached to it.

Pale yellow stains of sweat are visible at the armhole, and the seam at the crotch seems to be reinforced later with hand stitches. The side seam of the right trouser (see fig.4) and the stitches of the sleeve at the armhole are unravelling. These signs of wear indicate how the garment has been personalized by being worn and maintained by the owner. It is now in a state of preservation where it has come to embody a fixed timeframe of experiences and is no longer subject to the constant changes of wear (Sampson 6). The most unusual and interesting feature of the garment is that the waist panel at the back (fig.15) has a completely different print with slightly different variations of colours than the rest of the garment. It leaves us wondering whether this was an intentional design choice or whether the maker was faced with a shortage of the original printed fabric.



LEFT Fig. 6 Size Label.
Beige silk Oriental-motif
printed jumpsuit with
short sleeves ca.1970. FRC
1993.06.012. Photo taken
by author



ABOVE Fig. 5 Beige silk Oriental-motif printed
jumpsuit with short sleeves ca.1970. FRC
1993.06.012. Photo taken by author



ABOVE Fig. 7 Care Label. Beige silk
Oriental-motif printed jumpsuit with short
sleeves ca.1970. FRC 1993.06.012. Photo
taken by author



Fig. 9 Absolutely Amazing
Unworn 1920s Silk Pongee
Beach Pajamas Jumpsuit M.
Retrieved from [Etsy.com](https://www.etsy.com).
Accessed 29 Oct. 2023

DESIGN INSPIRATION

The style of the garment speaks to the modernization of Japanese fashion and has come far from the traditional kimonos of Japan yet it encompasses aesthetic choices that are reminiscent of its rich traditional material culture. The design seems to have a striking resemblance to beach pajamas which were prevalent in the 1920s and 1930s. Women began to wear bifurcated garments in more public settings, and a style of resort wear that was inspired by Eastern pyjama styles was introduced (D'Agati and Schiff). These beach pajamas were characterised by flowing pants and a wrap-style top which were often jointly constructed to create a jumpsuit. Browsing for 'Pongee Silk Beach Pajamas' on Etsy resulted in some vintage garments that are almost identical to the jumpsuit in question both in terms of a plain lightweight silk fabric and the variety of colours used. The 1920s Silk Pongee Beach Pajamas Jumpsuit seen in fig.9 presents a very similar design of a bodice that opens in the front and patch pockets on the pants. The print however seems to be a traditional hand-painted Kyo-yūzen with traditional motifs and details like the negative space where the resist would have been applied.

Beyond the aspect of design, an interesting common feature of both the 1920s Silk Pongee Beach Pajamas Jumpsuit (fig.10) and the one jumpsuit in the FRC (fig.6) is the size and care label where we find identical typefaces and detailed instructions. This further pushes the question of whether the FRC jumpsuit is indeed from much earlier than the 1970s.



Fig. 10 Chinese beach pajamas in the Fort Lauderdale News, February 23, 1926. Retrieved from The Vintage Woman Magazine. Accessed 3rd Nov. 2023

ORIENTALISM

Taking into consideration the amalgamation of Eastern and Western influences on the garment and the labels with text in English, it is apparent that the jumpsuit was designed with the intention to be exported or with a Western consumer in mind, perhaps in the context of tourism. This coexistence of contrasting artistic influences brings us to the Orientalism associated with this piece. Orientalism is a term coined by Palestinian-American academic and literary critic Edward Said. Amongst the many meanings that Said attributes to Orientalism in his book of the same name, he often describes the relationship between the "Orient" (East) and the "Occident" (West) as problematic where the West inevitably has the upper hand. The specific idea of Orientalism that is more relevant with this jumpsuit in particular is perhaps best described by Phillippe de Monte, the Director of The Metropolitan Museum of Art as "the West's fascination with and assimilation of ideas and styles of the East" (Martin and Koda 7). In the Meiji Period (1868-1912) fashion in Japan was finally able to free itself from the clutches of sumptuary laws in the Edo Period (1603-1868) and made space for personal reflection in terms of colours, textiles, ornamentation and construction (Slade 41). Japan had come far from the restriction and isolation of the Tokugawa Shogunate period (1639 to 1853) and there was an enthusiastic exchange of ideas and interests with the West (Martin and Koda 73). There was an enthusiastic exchange of Western influences in Japanese fashion as well as Japanese influences in the Western world.



Fig. 10 Absolutely Amazing
Unworn 1920s Silk Pongee
Beach Pajamas Jumpsuit M.
Retrieved from Etsy.com.
Accessed 29 Oct. 2023

Akiko Fukai, the Chief Curator at Kyoto Costume Institute, explains Japonism or the phenomenon of the influence of Japanese fashion on Western garments by describing the various Western garments they encounter at the institute that incorporate motifs and construction techniques from traditional Japanese garments (Fukai 17). This includes the techniques of straight-line cutting for Kimonos and the prioritization of textiles over silhouettes that infiltrated Western fashion (Morriama 353). In 1860, Japanese objects, paintings and clothing gained increasing interest in the Western world and came to be sold in shops in Paris and London (Fukai 43). The 1970s were especially significant as they also brought on the advent of this juxtaposition of Eastern and Western influence in luxury fashion with designers like Issey Miyake, Kenzo Takada and Hanae Mori exploring this in their collections and showing them on runways in Paris (Wetherille).

Although this jumpsuit is a hybrid product of the advancement in industrializing traditional handmade practices (Parry-Williams 171), it aims to reflect the intricate beauty and the labour that would be required to create this by hand as well as the feelings of regaining agency of what one wore and how they expressed themselves. The jumpsuit that we are looking at embodies this history; the fascination of the West with Japan and its vibrant culture as well as Japan's rapid incline into modern fashion that would come to secure its place in the global fashion scene.



Fig. 11 Kasamatsu Motif, Beige silk Oriental-motif printed jumpsuit with short sleeves ca.1970.
FRC 1993.06.012. Photo taken by author



Fig. 12 Maple leaf motif, Beige silk Oriental-motif printed jumpsuit with short sleeves ca.1970.
FRC 1993.06.012. Photo taken by author



Fig. 13 Peony Motif, Beige silk
Oriental-motif printed jumpsuit
with short sleeves ca.1970.
Frc1993.06.012. Photo taken by
author

MOTIFS AND COLOURS

Polina Couture's blog posts on "The Meaning of Japanese Patterns, Flowers, Animals and Objects" acted as an illustrated dictionary to help identify and decode the variations of traditional motifs seen on the jumpsuit. Evergreen pine trees were a sign of longevity in ancient China and in Japan gate pines or Kadomatsu were used to decorate the front doors to welcome the Toshigami-sama, the god of the New Year ("Kimono Patterns - 26Matsu (Pine): A Symbolic Auspicious Pattern From the Heian Period | Kateigaho International Japan Edition- Japanese Culture, Arts, Lifestyle Magazine").

The specific Matsu motif seen here (see fig.11) is Kasamatsu or the view of a pine branch from above whose shape is representative of kasa or traditional Japanese hats (Couture). Maple leaves (see fig.12) represent autumn and are symbolic of change while the mountains are symbolic of the ascetic way of life and were considered the sacred places between the sky and the earth (Couture). Peonies (see fig.13) were considered the queen of flowers and symbolized courage and honour (Couture). Rivers or kawa were valued symbols of life as they brought life to crops like rice which are heavily water dependant and therefore life to the people (Couture). The flowers on the back (waist panel) (see fig.14) of the garment also seem to be artistic variations of traditional floral motifs of the peonies, chrysanthemums and camellias.

The colours that dominate the garment are blue, green and orange. The colour blue or "Ao" which refers to blue-green symbolizes purity and its significance comes from Japan's long-standing dyeing practice using Indigo (Mc Awley). Green or "Midori" is associated with growth, youthfulness and fertility and Orange or "daidaiiro" symbolizes happiness and development (Lewis).



Fig. 14 River Motif, Beige silk
Oriental-motif printed jumpsuit
with short sleeves ca.1970. FRC
1993.06.012. Photo taken by
author



Fig. 15 Back waist panel. Beige silk Oriental-motif
printed jumpsuit with short sleeves ca.1970.
FRC 1993.06.012. Photo taken by author

CREATIVE ENGAGEMENT AND REFLECTION

To engage with this rich material culture and explore traditional Japanese motifs and their symbolism I decided to illustrate a Kyo-yūzen-inspired digital textile print (see fig.16). I created a design consisting of traditional motifs like peonies, Gingko leaves and Hagi legumes and incorporated this print into a modern garment style. I attempted to recreate certain aspects of the print like the negative space outlines that would have traditionally been achieved by the application of a rice or rubber paste.

By interacting with the garment in multiple ways through the lens of a researcher, maker and from the perspective of the wearer, I was able to understand a larger aspect of the experiences that are embodied in its material, design and imperfections (Sampson 118). By studying the design choices and the curious imperfections of this garment I was able to trace its journey from before its conception and leave a record for the future to further develop these insights as the contexts in which this garment presents itself will continue to change and add new meaning to it. Locating this garment within a specific timeline proved to be an interesting journey as I contrasted elements that indicated an older period against the more rapid fashion interactions that escalated in the 1970s. This included the design features of the beach jumpsuit style, details on the labels and more importantly the fact that the owner was an avid wearer of vintage pieces. It was also equally important for me to understand how the wearer interacted with the garment and how she must have treasured this piece to have maintained it and repaired it when its delicate construction unravelled. I particularly enjoyed the process of identifying and learning about the traditional textile practice of Kyo-yūzen by tracing back from the modernized screen-printed version of the jumpsuit. My fascination with the brightly coloured creative display on the garment led me to discover a much older intricate handcraft that continues to be practiced today. The print design has both a symbolic connotation through the use of traditional motifs as well as greater signifiers of the alternative methods of production that came into play with Western fascination with Japanese clothing and textiles. The way resist paste was replaced with screen and gold flakes were replaced with gold paint to make the production easier and inexpensive (Okimoto 151) gives us insight into the economy in which the piece was produced.

To conclude, all that has been discussed so far about this garment acts as a framework for a more complex conversation about the effect of the exchange of design influences and innovations in the production of traditionally hand-crafted textiles. I believe that these conversations and analyses of such 'Oriental' garments act as a method of decolonizing fashion and preserving the heritage of material culture.



Fig. 16 Kyo-Yuzen-Inspired Motif, Illustrated on Procreate by Kanishka Kumar, 2023.



Fig. 17 Kyo-Yuzen-Inspired Print on Garment, Illustrated on Procreate by Kanishka Kumar, 2023.



Fig. 18 Kyo-Yuzen-Inspired Print, Illustrated on Procreate by Kanishka Kumar, 2023.

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