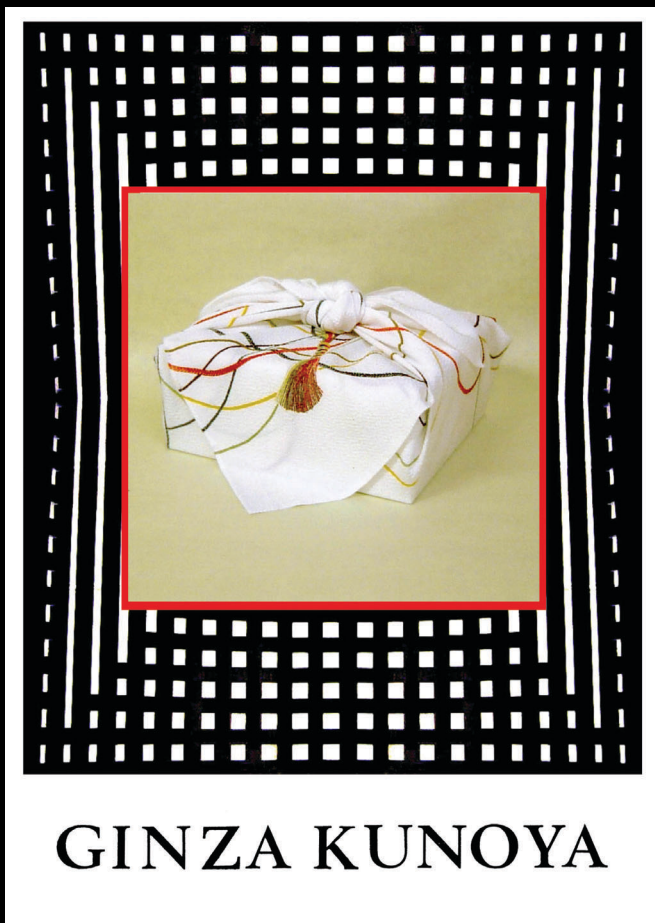


Part 1

Back in the Age of the**Furoshiki**

By Kikuchi Taiji

Photo: Ginza Kunoya



LONG time ago, as the name suggests, the *furoshiki* (*furo* means bath in Japanese) had been used as the cloth laid out when changing clothes in the powder room outside the public bath. At the time when this word originated, only a few Japanese bathed in steam baths, which were only available at shrines and temples. These baths were for groups, not individuals, so bathers are said to have covered themselves with kimono so that they did not come into contact with each other. Some people may remember these kimono being called *yu-katabira* (bathing wear). Between the Muromachi and Edo periods (1392-1867), *sento* or public baths came into fashion, and more people in Japan came into the habit of taking baths. People using *sento* would remove their kimono and change into the *yu-katabira*, and the kimono were then

wrapped in *furoshiki*. After bathing, the *furoshiki* would be laid out so they could wear the kimono in the dressing room. They would then wrap their belongings in the *furoshiki* to carry them home. People dyed *furoshiki* with their family crest or wrote their names on them to keep them from being confused with other people's belongings. This custom remains to the present day, with some *furoshiki* featuring a piece of triangular white cloth on the inside for writing the owner's name. Another type of *furoshiki* called *hira-zutsumi* has long been used to transport and wrap articles.

We have pictorial records of clothes wrapped in *hira-zutsumi* and balanced on people's heads appearing in the *Senmen Kokyo* (ancient sutras copied on fans, a treasure of Shitenno-ji Temple in Osaka), a style that has been carried on to the present day among the *Oharame* women of Kyoto, who carry these bundles on their heads.

We can assume this custom was handed down over the centuries. We no longer see *furoshiki* used at baths, but they are in common use as a means of carrying and wrapping articles today.

■ Furoshiki as Carrying Materials

Furoshiki used for carrying articles are squares ranging in size from some 2m across to 34cm, with 34cm serving as a standard unit. *Furoshiki* are available in double size (68cm), triple, quadruple, and six times as big, although they are also sold in irregular sizes. The small *furoshiki* are known as *fukusa* and are used in auspicious events and for condolences. The most popular design for the largest size, *ittan-furoshiki*, is called *karakusa-monyo* (arabesque pattern) in white on green cloth, and is often used in moving house or for wrapping futons. Long ago, *ittan-furoshiki* were used as *yutan* to wrap the paulownia-wood dressers that were part of a bride's dowry. Unlike the silk *furoshiki* discussed below, most large *furoshiki* used to wrap large articles are made of durable cotton, though there are still a very few people in northeastern Japan who have large *furoshiki* of indigo-dyed cloth adorned with meticulous and lovingly hand-stitched embroidery. These are extremely valuable.

Pedestrians strolling in Ginza, where there are many art galleries, will see people carrying very expensive and valuable paintings in frames wrapped in dark brown or dark blue unadorned *furoshiki*. Even today, the Yoshino checked or striped *furoshiki* are popular as a substitute for bags

especially among people who love Edo style, and more and more people are enjoying the freedom to use a single furoshiki cloth as a thin *obi-sash* to accessorize the *yukata* (light cotton kimono) which has become popular in recent summers.

■ **Furoshiki as Wrapping Materials**

Silk furoshiki used as wrapping materials or accessories are said to presently account for more than 80% of the furoshiki sold. Most of these are made of pure silk, with the remainder made from synthetics such as nylon or viscose rayon. The reason most are made of silk puckered crepe is because of the importance of stretchiness in the fabric when they are used for wrapping.

Many silk furoshiki are specially dyed, with elegant classic

patterns born of the dyeing techniques taken from kimono, which include *komon* fine pattern dyeing, *yuzen* wax-resist dyeing, hand-painted patterns, and tie-dyeing, and modern patterns created by contemporary Japanese artists. Furoshiki hand-painted by artists feature Mt. Fuji, *Kara-jishi* (Chinese lions), dolls and other motifs, which appear as scroll paintings on silk cloth and can even be framed to adorn rooms as part of an interior design, as well as fine patterns of tiny flowers or butterflies dyed using carved forms. The motifs run the entire gamut, including such fine work as having each individual image in the pattern wrapped in thread by hand tie-dyeing.

Most are approximately 70cm in radius and average ¥10,000-20,000 in price, but these furoshiki vary greatly in size and feature rich variety.

In the next issue, we will introduce five patterns of traditional Furoshiki wrapping.

J.S

Photo: Ginza Kunoya



A wide variety of Furoshiki are displayed in the shop

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