

Eurasia Foundation International Lectures, Fall 2020 Semester

“The Construction and Transformation of East Asiaology” Lecture Series (8)

**Title: Related Research on Japanese Costume and Asian Exchanges:
The Case of Edo Period Sarasa**

For the 8th Eurasia Foundation International Lectures, we invite Dr. Yun-Ju Huang, assistant researcher and Section Chief of the Research and Management Section at the Southern Branch of the National Palace Museum (SBNPM), to be our guest speaker. Dr. Huang brings many valuable pictures of *Sarasa* (更紗, Chintz) to show to students during her speech. The content of her speech includes the definition of *Sarasa*, the influence on Japanese costume culture, *Meibutsugire* (名物裂), the value as historical materials, how helpful is the studies on *Sarasa* for the studies on Southeastern fabric in the SBNPM.

1. The definition of *Sarasa* and Craft

The word “*Sarasa*” came from Japan, which means Indian painted and stained calico textiles imported to Japan by foreign merchant ships from the 16th to 18th century. This Indian fabric became popular in the whole world at that period of time and was exported to Asian countries, like Japan, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Burma and then to Europe. The dyestuffs of *Sarasa* were mainly madder and indigo dye and the characteristics of craft was that it flexibly used two methods including mordant like Alum, rust iron, and wood ash and the method of Batik. These techniques produce *Sarasa* with fresh colors while permitting intermittent changes. However, in the later period, the materials were not enough, and it developed the methods of woodblock print.

2. The Influence on Japanese Costume Culture

Earliest record of *Sarasa* in Japan was *Nihon tokouki* (日本渡航記, Travel to Japan) in which it described the Captain of British East India Company John Saris (1580-1643) arrived at Hirado (平戸) in the 18th year of Keicho (慶長 18, 1613) in the Edo period and presented Indian cotton cloth and *Sarasa* to Hirado feudal lord as gifts. Then there were records that importing *Sarasa* and large *Sarasa* can gain rewards. The Tokugawa shogunate began the period of *Sakoku* (鎖国, “closed country”) since the 10th year of *Kan’ei* and records showed that various beautiful *Sarasa* frequently became choices for tribute. The import of *Sarasa* promoted the great development in Japanese dyeing textiles techniques. However, according to historical records at that time, the adhesive quality of Japanese *Sarasa* was not ideal and thus unfixed dye was washed off easily. In addition, because of the influence of *Sarasa* on Japanese dyeing techniques, there were dyeing techniques in Japan since early modern period, like *Tegakizome* (手描き染, hand-drawn), *Tsujigahana* (辻が花染), *Kanokoshibori* (鹿の子絞り), and *Yuzen* (友禅染) technique.

Dr. Huang explains that “Kimono” was called “Kosode” in the *Edo* period. When Western culture was introduced to Japan in the *Meiji* Era, in order to differentiate Japanese costume and foreign costume (*Youfuku*, 洋服), Japanese costume began to be called “Kimono.” The name of “*Yuzen*” came from Miyazaki Yūzensai, a Japanese fan painter known in Kyoto and famous for his Bird-and-flower painting and painting of the figures of ladies of *Genji Monogatari* (源氏物語, The Tale of Genji). He used a special dyeing technique which made it easier for him to painted his beautiful designs on *Kosode*.

3. From *Meibutsugire* to *Sarasa*

The import of foreign Dyed textile brought enormous impacts to the culture and technique of Japanese textiles. Chinese textile was imported to Japan from the Southern *Sòng*, *Yuán*, *Ming* dynasties and then Indian *Sarasa* was imported. Chinese textile was used to make aristocracy and samurai’s clothes and for interior design to demonstrate their status and wealth. Japanese *Chajin* (茶人, tea ceremony practitioners) preferred Chinese textiles and used them to mount calligraphy and painting, wrap tea set, and even for collection and enjoyment. For the wrapping cloth of teacup box, they preferred *Sarasa*. In the middle of the *Edo* period, people started to tabulate and classify imported textiles which were treasured by tea ceremony practitioners and these scrap books were called *Meibutsugire*. *Meibutsu* means famous, hard-to-get things and *gire* means scraps, pieces. These kinds of scrap books were mainly for feudal lord, aristocracy and tea ceremony practitioners to demonstrate they were deep-rooted culturally.

4. The Value of *Sarasa* as Historical Materials

Because most people at that time could not obtain lavish textiles but reading the album of paintings, and thus books like *Sarasa benran* (佐羅紗便覽), *Zouho kafu benran* (增補華布便覽), *Sarasa zufu* (更紗圖譜) appeared. Japanese began to imitate and produce *Sarasa* and the products were called *Wasarasa* (和更紗). However, due to the difficulty to obtain natural dyed materials, Japanese were not able to dyed red color like Indian *Sarasa*. After The Tokugawa shogunate began the period of *Sakoku*, the government officials in Nagasaki left many “*Tanmono kire honchou*” (端物切本帳) as a record of imported textile scraps.

5. Studies on Southeastern Textiles in the SBNPM from Japanese *Sarasa*

Dr. Huang thinks the meaning and effects of the studies on *Sarasa* is that it is beneficial for the contrasts among textile collections in museum. The important duty of museum is to appraise dating, exact naming, and quality of the artworks. There are more systemic records on *Sarasa* in Japan and thus as academic references these records are helpful for contrasting with textiles in different countries. Through investigation and contrast with cases above, we deepen our research on the

Southeastern textiles in the SBNPM.

At last, Dr. Huang states that the duty of museum is research on cultural relic, exhibition planning, arranging exhibits, and marketing. She encourages students to engage their interests, language advantage with museum and welcome them to visit SBNPM.

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