

THE KAMEI COLLECTION

19TH CENTURY EUROPEAN TEXTILES

Designs and Patterns

4



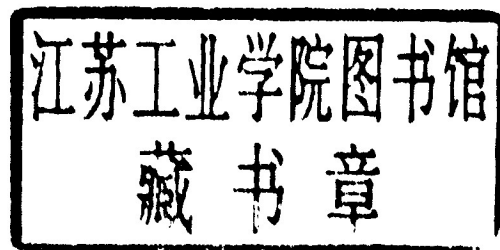
BIJUTSU SHUPPAN-SHA

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A Brief History and Background of the Koreaki Kamei Collection

Count Koreaki Kamei (1861–1896) was an adopted son of the former local lord of Tsuwano. He began to serve the imperial court at the age of eleven. Kamei's position at court put him in close contact with the sudden influx of Western culture into Japan during his youth. He went abroad twice to study; once to England for general studies from 1876 to 1880, and then to Germany where he studied aesthetics and art history from 1886 to 1891. The textiles samples presented in this series are considered to have been collected by Kamei during his time in Germany, although the motivations, place, date and methods of collection can only be surmised today.

It is said that Kamei, who collected these samples and publications with such fervency that he would sacrifice his living expenses and neglect his appearance in order to raise the money to purchase them, often received suspicious glares from shopkeepers because he was so shabbily dressed. Yet he returned to Japan with a collection reportedly valued at ¥100,000 at a time when the prime minister's annual salary stood at ¥10,000.

Kamei's life spanned a time of rapid change, when Japan moved from the strict isolation policy of the Tokugawa Era to the open-door policy of the Meiji Reformation. In November 1887 the Meiji government dispatched a survey party led by Tomomi Iwakura to Europe and the United States. After approximately two years, the survey party returned to Japan with the certain conclusion that Japan was markedly inferior to Western countries in terms of industrial technology. Hence the slogan "increased production and promotion of industry," which epitomized the government's initiatives to advance technology and assimilate Western civilization. One example of government efforts during this period is the establishment of the Ministry of Industry in 1870, which facilitated direct government administration over mining, railroad, telegraph and steel industries, lighthouses, shipbuilding and so forth.

The first means to rapidly adopt new technologies and theories was to invite European engineers, scholars and specialists to Japan, borrow their expertise and learn from them. The second means was to send young, able Japanese to Europe to study, with the hope that they would help to promote Japan's modernization upon their return.

Leaders of modernization also encouraged Westernization of everyday life, such as the adoption of Western dress, lamps, chairs, tables and so forth. In 1870, all government uniforms were designated to be of Western style, and in 1872, all traditional ceremonial garments worn by government employees, with the exception of vestments, were abolished and replaced by Western dress. In addition, from 1884 upper class women began to wear Western dresses, and in 1886 Western costume was formally required for ceremonies held at the imperial court. In 1883, the Rokumeikan was constructed, in the Western style, as a place for social gatherings of Japanese and foreign dignitaries. Day and night, the Rokumeikan was the scene of banquets, balls, bazaars and concerts. All visitors to the Rokumeikan had to be accompanied by a partner, and all were required to don Western apparel.

At about that time, the National Printing Bureau ordered eight machines from Germany for marking wallpaper. These machines arrived from Berlin and began to operate in July 1882.

As for textile technology, we can trace the following developments. In March 1874, the Third Kyoto Exposition displayed a French Jacquard and other Western weaving machinery which had been brought back to Japan by artisans of the Nishijin garment district of Kyoto. In 1875, Western weaving machines for patterned textiles were on public display at the Industrial Experiment Station in Tokyo, where the operation of an Austrian Jacquard and related tools was demonstrated. By 1877, a loom maker named Kohei Araki of Nishijin had succeeded in building a Japanese Jacquard machine modeled after the imported machines of iron construction, but he constructed his machines mainly of wood. Two of Araki's Jacquard looms were exhibited at the First Industrial Exposition in Tokyo in August 1877, along with the most up-to-date tools, machines and products of agricultural and manufacturing districts. These looms were still far from capable of mass production, but they marked the first step towards the realization of "increased production and promotion of industry."

This early period of technological advancement in the textiles industry focused upon mastering the use of Western machines and synthetic dyes, with the aim of manufacturing patterned textiles with the new weaving machines. This intense focus upon technical matters left little room for the creation of original designs. The reconstruction of the imperial residence in the former Edo Castle in the 1880's provided a good opportunity for the creation of new fabric designs, as textiles were prepared for the interior decoration and furnishings of the palace. A design scheme appropriate to a modern imperial palace was required.

While the details of the interior design of the palace were being discussed, Kōreiki Kamei left Japan for the second time to study in Germany. In Europe, design had already become an important element of industry. It was therefore natural that Kamei, as a student of aesthetics and art history, should be sensitive to this new trend and turn his attention to design drawings. Kamei probably collected the design drawings presented in this series more because of his recognition of the significance of industrial design than out of sheer personal interest. The many variations of similar patterns included in his collection hint at such a motivation.

Presumably, Kamei eagerly collected samples of printed textiles, wallpaper and the like while in Germany because he had his own view of the future. Recalling scenes at the Rokumeikan, he must have fostered a great dream in the depths of his mind.

Yet before Kamei returned to Japan in 1891, circumstances there had already changed. The Rokumeikan was closed as Kaoru Inoue, the Foreign Minister who planned the institution, resigned from his post under the pressure of opposition to his proposal to revise international treaties. In the meantime, outcries against Western-style dress were making frequent appearances in the newspapers. The enthusiasm for Westernization, which had been hasty and superficial, subsided and gave way to a reevaluation of the advantages of Japanese-style dress.

Contrary to Kamei's intention, the textile and paper samples for clothing and interior design which he brought back to Japan with great aspirations were not given a chance to be used. It was not until 1982, almost a century after they reached Japan, that they caught the public eye in a special exhibition of this collection.

(Translated by Indra Levy)

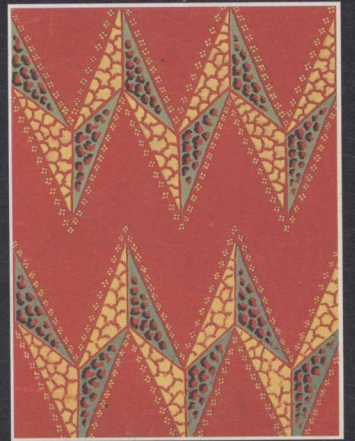
Tetsurō Kitamura

We would like to express our deepest appreciation to the Kamei Onkokan, the owner which has preserved these rare materials, for permission for their use in publication. All the photographs in this book were offered by the Kasumikaikan Institute, the Exhibition Committee of Historical Materials. To them we also owe our most grateful thanks.

Illustrations in this book are as follows : designs (pigments on paper); dyeing (wool and cotton printed with wood block or copperplate); weaving (silk and wool); and wallpaper (print on paper).

Cropping, enlargement and contraction have been made by the publisher.

DESIGNS
and
PATTERNS



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