

# MATSURI!

*Japanese Festival Arts*







# SURRI!

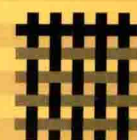
## *Japanese Festival Arts*

**GLORIA GRANZ GONICK**

*With contributions by* Yo-ichiro Hakomori  
Hiroyuki Nagahara  
Herbert Plutschow



UCLA  
FMCH  
*Textile Series*





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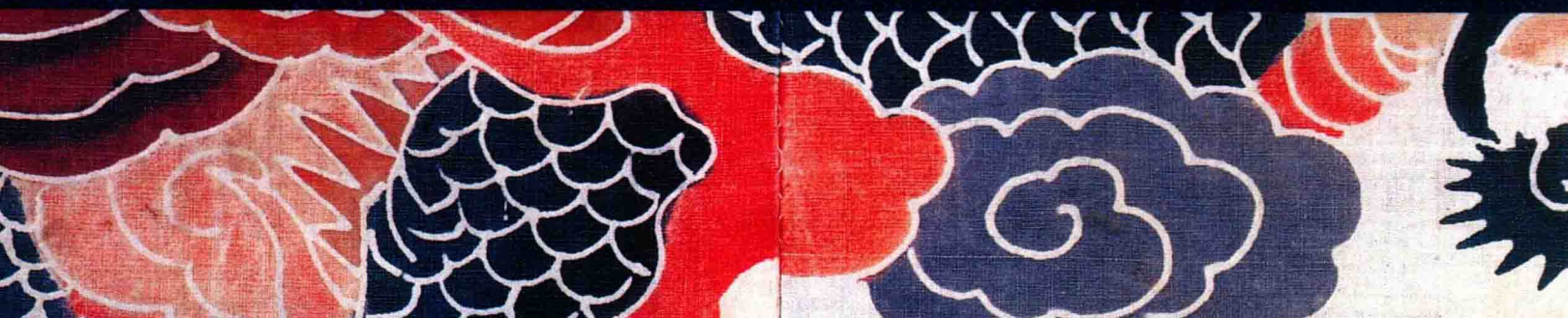


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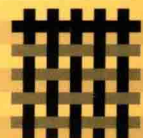
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# Forewords

THE SPECTACULAR JAPANESE COMMUNITY FESTIVALS KNOWN AS MATSURI ARE CENTURIES old. Even today, in a society driven by technological advancement, these annual rites continue to function as a mechanism for purification and renewal and also to ensure all aspects of communal productivity. The pageantry of these events—their extraordinary dress, performance, and Shinto-Buddhist ritual enactment—brings communities together in an act of worship that is, as well, an extravagant artistic celebration. Dominated by the gorgeous textiles worn by troupes of participants, *matsuri* also boldly incorporate decorated banners, exquisitely “dressed” festival wagons, dramatic masks, and elaborate portable shrines. The historical importance of *matsuri* within the cycle of annual religious events in Japan is also reflected in the representation of these festivals in several pictorial forms, from lavish screen paintings to elegant woodblock prints.

Despite the diversity of elements that combine to create the astonishing *matsuri*, textiles dominate in numbers as well as in visual impact. The UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History has published eight books dealing with Asian textile subjects in the past fourteen years. This sustained effort has been predicated primarily on the great breadth and depth of the Museum’s Asian textile holdings, which now total approximately twenty-five hundred items. *Matsuri! Japanese Festival Arts* is no exception. We are deeply indebted to visiting curator Gloria Granz Gonick for her efforts over the past eleven years to collect and document Japanese festival textiles. These textiles became the basis for the development of a major exhibition that presents, for the first time, the panoply and complexity of *matsuri*. Additionally, as this book demonstrates, the festival textiles are a remarkable resource for an investigation of *matsuri* themselves and the Shinto-Buddhist religious framework that surrounds and informs them.

The Asian textiles featured in previous Fowler publications serve a wide range of functions in their communities of origin. The ikat cloths of Borneo, for example, bear intimate connections with the former practices of head-taking, while those of the island of Flores are exchanged in great numbers to bind extended kin groups together in marriage alliances. None of our projects, however, has involved a more dramatic usage of textiles than the Japanese *matsuri*, where they are displayed quite explicitly to astonish and delight the deities (*kami*). Their bold colors and patterning seem anomalous in Japan, where so much else in the aesthetic domain is characterized by restraint. Whether they are worn as costumes, flown as banners, or wheeled through the thronged streets on huge carts, the purpose of their vibrant and often eccentric style is to attract the attention of the *kami*. These spirits are called upon to come and reside in the community during the festival and impart their blessings. Thus the textiles themselves are a key element in promoting community well-being from one annual festival to the next.

This dramatic use of textiles attracted Gloria Gonick’s attention and set her on a path of discovery that ultimately resulted in this book and the exhibition it accompanies. She has documented the use of textiles in more than twenty-five different festivals scattered over the length and breadth of Japan. This book interweaves these textiles with the other arts that constitute *matsuri* as well as with their symbolic meanings and the history of textile making in Japan. While many of our American readers may have some familiarity with Japanese textile traditions, they will probably be surprised that Gloria’s research path also led her to western China, a source for some of the most prized textiles used in *matsuri*, especially in the famous Gion Festival held in Kyoto.



This project has been years in the making and has involved the participation of many individuals and institutions. The book has been an ambitious undertaking, exploring several aspects of *matsuri* from an interdisciplinary perspective. While Gloria Gonick has done the primary research on the rich and complex subject of festival textiles—indigenous and imported—we are indebted to several other scholars: Herbert Plutschow, Professor of East Asian Languages and Cultures at UCLA, who addresses both the political underpinnings and theatrical aspects of *matsuri*; Yo-ichiro Hakomori, Adjunct Assistant Professor, School of Architecture, University of Southern California, who deals with spatial aspects of *matsuri*, including the actual context for the events, as well as with the various religious and secular structures that are part of the festivities; and Hiroyuki Nagahara, Assistant Professor of Japanese, Department of East Asian Languages and Literature, University of Hawai'i at Manoa, who explores the fascinating world of inscriptions and calligraphy related to *matsuri*. Together these essays represent the most comprehensive treatment of these Shinto-Buddhist festivals to date.

As indicated above, many of the works in the exhibition are part of the Fowler Museum's permanent collections. We have also borrowed crucial works from many lenders whom we thank for so generously assisting us in presenting a full picture of the diverse artworks that comprise *matsuri* (please see the list of Lenders to the Exhibition, p. 4). Some of the pieces have required special loan arrangements due to their age and fragility, and we would like to acknowledge the cooperation of Joe and Etsuko Price and Cynthia Burlingham, Deputy Director of Collections, UCLA Hammer Museum and Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts.

*Matsuri! Japanese Festival Arts* would not have been possible without generous financial support. Major funding for the exhibition/publication project has come from the Nikkei Bruin Committee, a group dedicated to supporting Japanese and Japanese American related programs at UCLA; the Christensen Fund; Lloyd and Margit Cotsen; and the Blakemore Foundation. Support for educational programming has been provided by the City of Los Angeles—Cultural Affairs Department, and the UCLA Center for Japanese Studies. Thanks also go to the San Francisco Bay Area Rug Society; Manus, the support group of the UCLA Fowler Museum; and an anonymous donor.

As always, a project of this scope and complexity could not have been realized without the dedication of the entire Fowler Museum staff. Given challenging time constraints, many staff members have worked tirelessly to produce the exhibition and book. Roy Hamilton, Curator of Asian and Pacific Collections, has overseen all aspects of the project's development and has worked very closely with Gloria Gonick on both the exhibition and the publication. Planning for the exhibition has been deftly managed by Director of Exhibitions David Mayo, who accompanied Gloria to Japan and took both still photographs and video footage of festivals at several locations. His exposure to *matsuri* in Japan has given him perfect inspiration for the exhibition design, which captures so well the spirit and pageantry of the festivals. He and his installation team have done a wonderful job of creating a sense of the event itself and its dramatic arts. Betsy Quick, Director of Education, has produced accessible and lively texts to narrate the exhibition's stories, and Martha Crawford has designed an equally sympathetic graphic package to present them. The detailed process of securing loans for the exhibition has been ably overseen by Sarah Kennington, Registrar, and Farida Sunada, Associate Registrar. They worked closely with Fran Krystock, Collections Manager, and Anna Sanchez, Associate Collections Manager, in coordinating the complex retrieval of Fowler collections from storage and the transportation of loaned materials to the Museum. Jo Hill, Director of Conservation, did a meticulous job of



preparing objects for photography and installation, which is especially challenging with textile arts. A roster of educational programs and family events to extend the project's interpretative range has been developed by Betsy Quick, Director of Education, with Alicia Katano, Assistant Director of Education, and Ilana Gatti, Program and Events Coordinator. Publicity and promotion has been creatively managed by Stacey Ravel Abarbanel, Director of Communications. Lynne Brodhead, Director of Development, and Leslie Denk, Assistant Director of Development, undertook with great success the weighty task of fundraising. Other administrative and financial aspects of the project were skillfully managed by David Blair, Assistant Director, with the assistance of Allison Railo, Accounting Administrator, and Betsy Escandor, Executive Assistant.

Assembling a book with several authors and with a multitude of photographic sources has demanded the coordinated efforts of a highly talented, professional team. Lynne Kostman, Managing Editor, has done a masterful job overseeing the final stages of editing the volume and integrating its constituent parts. The essays were edited with a sure hand by Michelle Ghaffari. The beautiful book design was managed and executed by Danny Brauer, Director of Publications, who captured so elegantly the vibrancy of *matsuri*. Don Cole is to be commended for his gorgeous photography, which has brought the festival textiles vividly to life.

Finally, our sincere thanks go to Gloria Granz Gonick, for the enormous task she has undertaken to curate the exhibition and author the publication. It has surely been a labor of love, and we are grateful to her for her passionate commitment to Japanese textiles. We are pleased to be the first museum to mount a major exhibition on this particular subject, which we couldn't have accomplished without her. Once rare and misunderstood, *matsuri* textiles are herewith unveiled as part of the mystique that delights the deities, and, we are sure, will delight our readers as well.

Marla C. Berns, *Director, UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History*

IN JAPAN, FESTIVALS (MATSURI) ARE NOT LIMITED TO THE SAIREI HELD AT SHINTO SHRINES. There are also the festivals held to propitiate the souls of ancestors and other deceased people during Obon (Festival of the Dead) and Ohigan (the equinoctial weeks); festivals for the gods of rice fields, supplicating them for an abundant harvest; festivals for the gods of mountains, asking for success in hunting; festivals for gods that protect land and homes; and countless other festivals as well. Festivals are held wherever people live.

Etymologically, the word *matsuri* means "to be beside and serve someone." More specifically, it means to sanctify and serve a transcendent being who exists above and beyond people. Thus, for Japanese, who have traditionally believed that such transcendent beings are everywhere in the real world, festivals have long been a deeply rooted part of life.

Being group events, festivals initially arose among communities of people who lived and worked together. Repeating their daily routines of going out to work at day-break and returning home at sunset for the night, people lived a life that changed with the cycle of the seasons. In so doing, they surely felt gratitude for the blessings of nature, as well as a reverence for nature itself; and as an expression of this, seasonal festivals—spring festivals, summer festivals, autumn festivals, winter festivals—came to be held.

At the center of Japanese festivals are *ujigami* and *chinju*, local guardian deities predicated on the thinking in Shinto, a religion unique to Japan. It is thought, however,



that these deities were originally gods of mountains, rivers, rice fields, and farms who existed long before Shinto took clear form. Japan's traditional festivals have, of course, changed with the times. Long after its establishment, Shinto became mixed with Buddhism, and the influence of this amalgamation (known in Japanese as *shinbutsu shugo*) can be seen in festivals. An even bigger change, however, was a separation of *shinji* (Shinto rituals) and *sairei* (festival, celebration), which became especially pronounced in the Meiji era.

Originally, festivals were composed of these two elements, *shinji* and *sairei*. In the Meiji era, however, a Shinto priesthood was established, and *shinji* became its exclusive province and at the same time grew more formalized. Only the *sairei* element was entrusted to the *ujiko* (communities under the protection of, and devoted to, a particular deity). That ordinary Japanese now think of festivals as merrymaking events is due to this fact.

Another and perhaps even more significant change in the history of festivals is currently ongoing. Since the end of World War II, the cohesion of communities, whether in towns, villages, or cities, has been weakening due to changes in the society at large. As a result, a situation has arisen in which festivals themselves are disappearing. Nowadays, to see a traditional festival, Japanese must betake themselves at certain limited times of the year to certain limited regions where such festivals are still being held.

While this is the situation in Japan, in the United States efforts are under way not only to research and record Japanese festivals but also to introduce them to the American people as an important aspect of traditional Japanese culture. This is an extremely significant project, and to the UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History and Ms. Gloria Gonick, who have planned it, I as a Japanese would like to express my deepest admiration and gratitude.

With festivals having had a relationship to the divine since their beginning, a nonquotidian type of space is produced in their rituals, which comprise actions seen as sacred. The implements used in festivals could even be said to have been fashioned for purposes of producing such space and such actions. The *shimenawa* (sacred braided rope) and other festival articles perform the role of transforming ordinary space into extraordinary sacred space, while the headgear, especially the masks, and the clothing have the function of temporarily changing people into gods themselves or into intermediaries between the divine and the human. By putting these on, people are converted from beings helpless before natural forces and evil spirits into beings that have the power to foresee the future, guarantee property and livelihoods, dispel evil spirits and epidemics, and ensure the prosperity and safety of the community. And while these ritual implements and garments include items that appear to be just like or modified versions of examples used in daily life, there are others that have completely unique forms. The exhibition being held at the Fowler Museum of Cultural History not only elucidates the cultural history and ethnological aspects of Japanese festivals, it also allows visitors to see many of the diverse forms that festivals have created. Garments used in festivals are another of its features.

I have great hopes that, spurred by this endeavor, additional and varied research into Japanese culture will be conducted in the United States and that the fruits of this research will benefit research into Japanese culture conducted in Japan.

Nagasaki Iwao, *Professor, Kiyoritsu Women's University, Tokyo*



# Preface

A LONG-STANDING INTEREST IN HISTORIC TEXTILES AND DRESS LED TO THE CREATION of this book. As the “close arts”—daily in our line of vision, underfoot, and next to our bodies—textiles seem to me to best reflect how cultural history influences the appearance of society.<sup>1</sup> Although in the beginning my absorption was international in scope, gradually I found the designs and textures of Japan to be the most intriguing. My sequence of discovery began with kimono designs and evolved into a fascination with the sober beauty of Japan’s everyday work textiles (*mingei*). Later, a distinct group of textiles related to *mingei* and intended for the Shinto-Buddhist shrine festivals called *matsuri* beckoned to me. *Matsuri* textiles, however, seemed to deny everything I had learned of Japanese aesthetics.

The tasteful restraint, elegance of line, and attention to surface textures that have come to be associated with Japanese arts were nowhere to be found in *matsuri* textiles. They were instead shockingly bold and unrestrained in hue, featuring large-scale designs that directly assaulted the eye and communicated their messages forcefully. I began to search for an explanation of these startling aesthetics and their acceptance in a social environment usually thought of as remarkably reserved. As an essential component of my inquiry, I began to travel to Japan on a regular basis to observe the Shinto-Buddhist shrine festivals in which the textiles and costumes make their appearance.

*Matsuri* are held in every corner of the Japanese archipelago, and each summer over a period of eleven years, I visited as many events as possible, documenting them through notes, photographs, sound recordings, and videotapes. Although extant English-language accounts of *matsuri* proved enlightening early in my endeavor, I was nonetheless initially handicapped by being a foreigner with an incomplete understanding of what I was seeing. Much more instructive were the interviews I secured and recorded with festival organizers, priests, performers, textile and costume craftspeople, and scholars in the related areas of Japanese folklore, history, religion, and the performing arts. It should be noted, however, that the clear and specific answers I yearned for as an American were not forthcoming. Instead information was offered reluctantly, with hesitation and abundant Japanese-language qualifiers: “maybe,” “perhaps” (*deshō*), and “I guess” (*to omoimasu*). Although rejecting absolutes may be a reflection of Buddhist mores regarding the absence of infinite truth, there appeared to be some justification for uncertainty and qualification. The facts about *matsuri* and its trappings do indeed differ from one locale to another. Tremendous variations exist in virtually every aspect of the rites, including ritual costumes or draperies. All festivals, however, are perceived as expressions of an almost universally respected need to demonstrate awe of the Shinto-Buddhist deities.

Concurrent with my field research on *matsuri*, I completed a masters degree in the Department of Art History at UCLA, taking a number of courses in the Department of East Asian Studies. I focused on the history of Japanese design and culture, as well as the study of the Japanese language. The myriad examples of weaving and dyeing I have encountered in my formal studies as well as in the field provide abundant evidence of the long tradition of high standards for cloth worn and used in Japan. Before the twentieth century, Japan was a nation of handweavers and textile artisans creating superb textiles of bast fiber, silk, and cotton from handlooms and backyard dye pots. It remains a nation in which both genders carefully discriminate regarding details of fabrics and attire. Reflecting taste through dress has also enjoyed a high priority, and concern with being suitably attired and demonstrating awareness of fashion has been a notable preoccupation of Japanese society. Unlike many other nations where it is the affluent in particular who demonstrate great concern regarding details of wardrobe,





in Japan ordinary working men and women, office ladies and salarymen, housewives and farmwives, as well as the advantaged, tend to be selective about cloth and design, and seemingly ready to stretch budgets in order to display their sense of taste.

In Japanese literature and drama, references to dress abound. The *Kojiki*, annals of the lives of the Japanese deities completed in 712 C.E., records the parting song of Opo-kuni-nusi, consort of the Japanese queen Suseri-bime. As Opo-kuni-nusi is about to depart on a trip, it is suggested in the Philippi translation (1968, 108), that his leave-taking was not entirely loving and that an abundant display of jealousy on the part of the queen may have motivated his decision to go. In the song below he appears to be either strenuously attempting to charm or distract her, changing his attire three times while he sings:

All dressed up  
     In my jet-black clothes  
 When I look down at my breast,  
     Like a bird of the sea,  
 Flapping its wings,  
     This garment will not do;  
 I throw it off  
     By the wave-swept beach.

All dressed up  
     In my blue clothes  
 Blue like the kingfisher,  
     When I look down at my breast,  
 Like a bird of the sea,  
     Flapping its wings,  
 This garment will not do;  
 I throw it off  
     By the wave-swept beach

All dressed up  
     In my clothes dyed  
 With the juice  
     Of pounded atane<sup>2</sup> plants  
     Grown in the mountain fields,  
 Now when I look down at my breast,  
     Like a bird of the sea,  
 Flapping its wings,  
     This garment will do. [Philippi 1968, 108–9]

This volume seeks to identify and describe the exuberant textiles and costumes of *matsuri* and to consider their significance within their cultural context. Many of the examples illustrated date from the Meiji period (1868–1912), the last time when handwork was produced by individual artisans for their own use or that of their neighbors. The textiles and articles of attire were collected from sources throughout Japan between 1979 and 2000. They are preserved today in the collections of the UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History and have been supplemented with examples drawn from other public and private collections. The unique focus on festival arts in



this publication allows us to identify the special aesthetics that differentiate the textiles worn and used on Japan's holy days.

At *matsuri* a cascade of beautifully crafted garments in vibrant hues meets the eyes, foregrounded distinctly against the hushed simplicity of the Shinto shrine. As the festival gets underway, the costumes and textiles seem to become an independent organic form, floating and expanding in shape and shade, assembling into a linear procession, then disintegrating into dance forms of circles and rows. Ultimately these swell into dynamic pulsating clusters in rhythm with the big *taiko* drums that summon performers to makeshift stages. It is an incredibly vital spectacle of human artistry at the service of a sacred occasion. Watching a *matsuri*, I realize that my long fascination with the "close arts" of individuals has expanded into a quest to understand the spiritual roots of an entire people.

Gloria Granz Gonick