

Chrysanthemums and Folding Fans: Yon-no-ma in the Kuroshoin

The rooms in the Kuroshoin at Ninomaru-goten Palace are decorated with murals of different motifs, including seasonal flowers, birds, and other features. This exhibition displays all Yon-no-ma (Fourth Room) murals, which fill the room with an autumnal atmosphere. In the Fourth Room, the *fusuma* sliding doors and walls below the *nageshi* (horizontal beams) are decorated with depictions of chrysanthemums in full bloom along various kinds of fences. Meanwhile, the walls above the *nageshi* depict various folding fans of different sizes fluttering around against a background of silver grass waving in the wind. These walls below and above the *nageshi* seem to constitute separate mural surfaces, but both have common features: depicting autumnal herbs and flowers and dealing with favorite motifs in Chinese and Japanese literary works, such as *waka* and other types of poems. Enjoy taking a close look at the chrysanthemum flowers and fences, which appear to be embossed, as well as the 46 folding fans, which are all portrayed differently.

Imperial visit in the Kan'ei era and the Fourth Room of the Kuroshoin

The Ninomaru-goten Palace was repaired in preparation for receiving a visit from Emperor Gomizunoo (1596–1680) in the third year of the Kan'ei era (1626). The existing murals designated as Important Cultural Properties were created during the repair. The Kuroshoin, which is located next to the Sotetsu-no-ma, in back of the Ohiroma (lit. “Grand Hall”), was called the “Kohiroma” (lit. “Small Hall”) at the time of the imperial visit. As seen by its name, the Kohiroma (Kuroshoin) is a building slightly smaller than the Ohiroma. It seems that, while the Ohiroma was used for official meetings, use of the Kohiroma was limited to meetings with high-ranking nobles, *daimyo*, etc. During the imperial visit, the area from the Ni-no-ma (Second Room) to the corridors of the Kohiroma (Kuroshoin) was used as a place to entertain princes, priests from the imperial family, and court nobles who accompanied the emperor. The Second Room on the lower level provided seats for princes and members of the regent families, the San-no-ma (Third Room) for priests from the imperial family, and the Fourth Room and the east corridor (Botan-no-ma) for high-ranking court nobles.

Fences, chrysanthemums, and streams

In the Fourth Room, which was formerly called the “Kiku-no-ma” (lit. “Chrysanthemum Room”), chrysanthemum flowers of different sizes depicted below the *nageshi* catch the eyes of visitors. Their petals, painted with thick layers of *gofun* (white pigment made from shell), appear to be embossed. This technique, which is also applied to the depictions of fences, is called “*moriage-gofun*” (lit. “piled gofun”) or “*okiage-gofun*” (lit. “elevated gofun”). Chrysanthemums grow along various kinds of fences. Straight bamboo fences are depicted on all walls in all directions. Fences made of a combination of bamboo and brushwood overlap bamboo fences near the center of the south side (displayed at the front in the gallery) and from the northernmost part of the west side to the north side (displayed on the right side seen from the front in the gallery). Brushwood fences are depicted from the eastern part of the *tobusuma* sliding doors on the north side nearly to the center of the *fusuma* sliding doors on the east side (displayed on the left side seen from the front in the gallery). These fences stand on the bottom of the surfaces or on the gilt ground. Behind the ground surfaces on the south to west sides and on the north side are ultramarine streams. On the north and east sides, green embankments stretch in front of and behind the fences. On and around the embankments on the east side are ground bamboos, gentians, and asters.

However, it is thought that the sliding doors on the north and east sides, facing the corridors, were removed when the room was used to entertain guests during the imperial visit and on other occasions, for the convenience of access and lighting. In such a case, visitors could not see the depictions of embankments and plants other than chrysanthemums. They could see only fences, chrysanthemums, and streams portrayed on the remaining south and west walls. These three elements are associated with many Chinese and Japanese literary works. The chrysanthemum, a species native to China, was used as a fragrant and medicinal herb and was thought to symbolize nobleness and avert evil. The custom of drinking *sake* with chrysanthemum flowers soaked therein in hope of longevity on the day of the Chrysanthemum Festival (the ninth day of the ninth month on the lunar calendar) is thought to have been established in China during the Western Han period (206 BCE to 8 AD) at the latest. The fourth day of Emperor Gomizunoo's visit to Nijo-jo Castle was the day of the Chrysanthemum Festival, when Tokugawa Hidetada (1579–1632), a former shogun, presented the emperor with a silver pail with artificial chrysanthemum flowers in it.

The custom of celebrating the Chrysanthemum Festival began to be practiced in Japan in the Heian period. Around that time, people in Japan

came to know the legend of “chrysanthemum water,” a stream of dew falling from chrysanthemum flowers as a remedy that brings longevity, and the Chinese poet Tao Yuanming (365–427), who loved chrysanthemums, both of which offered recurrent motifs in Japanese poetry. The legend of “chrysanthemum water” inspired not only many *waka* poems but also the tale of *Kikujido*, which was created by a Tendai-school priest in the Kamakura period. This Buddhist tale in turn provided inspiration for Noh plays, such as *Kikujido* and *Makurajido*. The streams depicted with chrysanthemums may have reminded visitors to the Fourth Room of the legend of “chrysanthemum water” and *Kikujido*. Also, the visitors may have associated the combination of fences and chrysanthemums with a passage from a poem by Tao Yuanming: “Plucking chrysanthemums under the eastern fence / serenely gazing at the southern mountains.”

Folding fans fluttering in the wind

Above the *nageshi* are 46 folding fans of different sizes scattered against a background of silver grass waving in the wind. While all these fans are depicted as unfolded, there are two kinds of fans in terms of the representation of shape: ones with a jagged edge due to the pleats and ones with a smooth arc edge, without depictions of pleats. The former kind of fan has 10 ribs, while the latter has 12 to 18 ribs. Fans with 15 ribs account for a majority of fans of the latter kind. In the world of Noh, the *shite* (protagonist), the *waki* (deuteragonist), and the *tsure* (tritagonist supporting the *shite* and the *waki*) have fans called “*chukei*” with 15 ribs, while musicians and others have fans called “*shizume-ogi*” with 10 ribs, that are also used in Noh dance in plain cloths. It is unknown whether all of the fans with 12 or more ribs are *chukei*, but it is certain that these fans are intentionally depicted differently. The fans widely vary in terms of their rib colors: some with each rib painted in a single color of red, green, brown, or black, some with half of the ribs painted in a single color and the remaining half in a different single color, some with every few ribs painted in a different color, and so on.

In addition, all fans differ in terms of the painting on them. The motifs range widely from flowers, birds, herbs, trees, and India-ink landscapes to various Japanese-style objects and patterns, painted on the gilt, ultramarine, gold- or silver-dusted, plain, or other ground. Interestingly, seven fans are decorated with the motif of fences, while a fan depicts autumnal herbs that closely resemble a part of the mural of fences and chrysanthemums below the *nageshi* (exhibited in the front).

By the way, silver grass in ear depicted in the background indicates that it is fall. “Fans in fall” denote things that are no longer necessary, after summer, when people need fans, is over. This motif is based on the legend of Ban Jieyu (c. 1st cen. BCE), a woman of the inner palace in the Western Han who compared herself to a fan in fall after losing the favor of the emperor. This legend also inspired many *waka* and other literary works in Japan, including the Noh play *Hanjo* created by Zeami in the Muromachi period (1336–1573).

The motifs of both the murals below and above the *nageshi* are associated with Noh plays. It is well known that warlords in the Warring States period loved Noh (= Sarugaku) as an indispensable form of entertainment on festive occasions and that the Tokugawa shogunate also protected Noh and used it for ritual and ceremonial purposes. At Nijo-jo Castle as well, Tokugawa Ieyasu and subsequent shoguns often held Sarugaku performances, and Emperor Gomizunoo was also entertained with a Sarugaku performance presented on the fourth day of his visit to the castle. Although neither *Kikujido* nor *Hanjo* were included in the program that day, the murals of the Fourth Room of the Kuroshoin must have reminded court nobles and high-ranking samurai, who were highly educated in Chinese and Japanese literature, of various literary works, including Noh plays.

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