"First we could see the fans come into sight, then the sprout-green robes of the gentlemen from the Emperor's Private Office. It was a splendid sight. The men wore their under-robes in such a way that the white material stood out against the green of their outer-robes, and I was reminded so much of the saxifrage blossoms in their green hedge that I almost expected of find a little cuckoo."

“Their linen robes, somber in the shade, catch he light—gauzy purples layered on yellows, whites and pale grays. Against these colors the noblemen open their red paper fans “like a field of pinks coming to bloom.”

“...a woman is lying in bed after her lover has taken his leave. She has a beautiful glossed silk lavender robe lined in violet pulled up over her head. She is asleep. She wears an apricot-colored chemise, a yellow raw silk robe, and a scarlet-pink unlined robe. The cords of her long trousers hang untied by her side.”

Exerpts from *The Pillow Book*,
*Sei Shonagon*

---

**Heian Japan, Costume 101**
Written & Taught by: Baroness Jahan Ara bint al-Yehya amat al-Hafeeza (S. J. Scott)

---

Mono no aware: beauty is precious because it is brief. A phrase coined in the 19th century became the edification of the ideal that was the basis for aesthetics of the Heian Era in Japan (794-1192).

Japan first began to develop its own personalized identity specifically in regard to the cultural arts and dress during the Heian imperial court in the ninth to eleventh centuries. Prior to this period of time, the Japanese culture observed Chinese customs and cultures.

For the women, Colors for robes came to be combined into discreetly named combinations known as *irome no kasane*. This sensitive layering of colors developed into a full and subtle bloom over the course of 300 years. Very little in the emerging style was Chinese. As an actual mode of dress, kasane fashion passed away with courtly society, but its influence on kimono style has had echoes down even to present day.

For the men, the colors of garments could represent their court rank, family status, and position in day to day life.

Color names and layered colors are woven throughout Heian culture not only in the clothing but also in poetry and literature—serving to pull together nature, season, person and incident into a poetic whole.

**GLOSSARY**

**Hakama.** Long pleated, very loose trouser worn by men and women

**Haribakama.** Another term for the Hakama worn by women.

**Heian-Kyo.** (Tranquility and Peace) Capital city during the Heian city; modern day Kyoto

**Hirao sashes.** Wide, flat braided belts worn by the the emperor, his immediate family and a few of or belts his most favored and highest ranked courtiers for very formal ceremonial occasions.

**Hitoe.** Type of underwear, sometimes referred to as the chemise, worn beneath the Uchigi and over the kosode and Hakama or Naga-bakama. It is the first visible layer.

**Itsutsu-ginu.** (robes) The robes worn over the Hitoe and under the Karaginu and Mo. Also referred to as Uchigi.

**Juni-hitoe.** Literally “twelve layers”, this is the term for the formal court attire of Heian women, consisting of a kosode, a hitoe, a naga-bakama, and many layers of uchigi, often finished with a karaginu and mo. It is misleading because women could wear 20-40 layers of uchigi. The name was coined after a lady in waiting drowned and in the reports it was written that her “twelve unlined layers” held her down in the water. The more correct term is karaginu mo. In 1074, the sumptuary laws changed, limiting the number of uchigi to 5.

**Karaginu.** Chinese styled jacket worn over the Uwagi and Mo for formal occasions. It was a very ornate layer, decorated either with brocade, embroidery, or painted images and is worn by high ranked nobility.

**Karaginu mo.** More accurate term for a court lady’s formal robes, commonly referred to as juni-hitoe.

**Kosode.** (short sleeve) Term used for the traditional robe style of Heian Japan. It is also the term for the undergarment of both women and men’s clothing.

**Ko-uchigi.** (little cloak) A dressing robe that could be put on over the uchigi to slightly dress up the outfit.

**Kumihimo.** (gathered threads)

**Mo.** Train or apron-skirt worn over the juni-hitoe for formal occasions. It was considered very formal and was required of women of the court while on official duty

**naga-bakama.** (divided skirt) Formal version of Hakama worn by court women

**Uchigi.** The outside uchigi was called Uwagi and the ones worn under it were called Kasane-Uchigi. The highest ranked court ladies could wear patterned silk; the ordinary court ladies wore unpatterned waves similar to modern habutae. They were also called the Itsutsuginu or kinu.

**Uwagi.** (over robe) This robe topped the layers of Uchigi. The higher the rank, the longer the Uwagi.

Resources used in the research for this document available upon request.