

Of Surplices and Certificates: Tracing Mugai Nyodai's *Kesa*

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On February 2, 2007 at Shōkokuji 相国寺 in Kyoto, abbesses from the Imperial Convents of Daishōji 大聖寺 and Hōkyōji 宝鏡寺 attended a viewing of a prelate's surplice (*kesa* 袈裟) associated with the thirteenth-century Zen abbess Mugai Nyodai (無外如大 1223–1298). This nine-panel yellow *kesa* (fig. 8.1) was spread out over much of the floor.¹ With awe and admiration, the two abbesses gazed at the garment. They both traced their dharma lineages back to Mugai Nyodai, and their temple titles still carry the name of the convent she founded, Keiaiji 景愛寺. This essay investigates the migration of Nyodai's *kesa* over the seven-hundred-plus years since her death through documentary evidence of its ritual transmission and textile analysis supporting its authenticity.

More than most Buddhist sects, Zen places importance on personal transmission from teacher to disciple. In Rinzai Zen, when the master recognizes the disciple's depth of religious understanding and feels he/she has experienced enlightenment (*satori* 悟り), he certifies this attainment by conferring an *inka*

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1 I took the following measurements on that occasion: 359.0 cm long by 108.0 cm wide at the edge and 91.0 cm wide at the shortest place. Formal nine-panel Rinzai *kesa*, rather than being true rectangles, widen at both ends, being shortest close to the center, where when draped, the *kesa* hangs straight down the prelate's back.



FIGURE 8.1 *Nine-panel yellow kesa stored in a box labeled “Mugai Nyodai’s kesa,” 13th or 16th c., Shōkokuji*

SOURCE: PHOTO BY KANAI MORIO

certificate, along with a bowl, transmission robe (*den-e* 伝衣), and portrait of himself. In China, theoretically, a single robe was passed through generations of disciples, its possession authenticating the new possessor as being next in the transmission of the dharma lineage going back to Bodhidharma (Daruma 達磨).² When Chinese Zen priests came to Japan in the thirteenth century, they perpetuated this custom, each master establishing a personal lineage. In hopes of spreading their faith, men like Nyodai’s mentor, Wuxue Zuyuan (Jp. Mugaku Sōgen 無学相元; also known as Bukkō Kokushi 仏光国師, 1226–1286), had several successors, both male and female, some of whom, including Nyodai, in turn established their own lineages.

In Japan, items associated with great prelates and temple founders were also set aside as treasures. Mortuary sub-temples dedicated to religious masters treated things like the robes they had worn as contact relics to be honored in special rituals.³ Documents attest to Nyodai’s robe functioning first as a transmission *kesa* and symbol of ritual investiture and later to being placed in Nyodai’s mortuary temple, Shōmyakuan 正脈庵, to be displayed as a contact relic in ceremonies and anniversary celebrations. Repeated relocation of the Nyodai *kesa*, however, resulted in questions of authenticity and conflated associations with people other than those who received it in direct transmission.

Verification of the authenticity of a twelfth-century garment cannot rely purely on documentary evidence. Careful textile analysis based on correspondences with dated fabrics is necessary. Weave structure, materials, sewing tech-

2 For the origins of transmission *kesa* see Yamakawa, “Five Dharma Transmission Robes at the Zen Temple Tōfukuji,” pp. 48–50.

3 Yamakawa, pp. 48–50.

niques, and tailoring must be given detailed consideration, particularly since objects as fragile as textiles were often reworked when they became worn, ripped, or soiled. These robes might be backed, retailored preserving a portion of the original textile, or totally remade with new materials that copied the older ones. The results of such conservation, renovation, and replication efforts deserve an objective historical analysis tempered by an appreciation of the religious attitudes that sustain the *kesa's* legacy.

Mugai Nyodai's Life, Training, and Reception of the Transmission Robe

According to her biography in the *Enpō dentō roku* 延宝伝灯録 (Enpō era [1673–1681] record of the transmission of the lamp), Nyodai was born in 1223 into the Adachi family and given the childhood name of Chiyono 千代野.⁴ She then married into the Kanazawa branch of the Hōjō regents serving the Kamakura shogun.⁵ Possibly she turned to Buddhist practice after the death of her husband as was customary at the time, though her religious involvement may have begun much earlier.⁶ Whatever the case, she met and studied under the Chinese prelate Wuxue Zuyuan after his arrival in Japan in 1279.

Invited to Kamakura by the Hōjō 北条 regent Tokimune 時宗 (1251–1284), Wuxue at the age of fifty-three may have seen Japan as a chance to escape the attacks on religious institutions resulting from the Mongol takeover (1274–1279) of the Southern Song and to plant the seeds of Chan (Zen) in more fertile ground.⁷ During the roughly sixteen years he resided in Japan he had numerous followers, some of whom established and headed Zen temples.

Wuxue's written and spoken words recorded in the *Bukkō Kokushi goroku* 佛光國師語錄 (Sayings of Zen Master Wuxue) reflect his high esteem for Nyodai.

4 *Enpō dentō roku*, vol. 19 (*Dai Nihon bukkyō zensho*, vol. 108, p. 260). On the other hand, an early eighteenth-century biography of Nyodai written by Tokugon Rihō 徳巖理豊 (1672–1745), abbess of Hōkyōji, and considered generally reliable, gives Nyodai's childhood name as Kenshi 賢子 (*Keiaiji kaisan, Shijūgan, Shōmyaku sōken Nyodai Osho*, beginning of scroll).

5 Partially due to the eradication of the Adachi family in 1285 during the Shimotsuki incident, conflicting data complicates the identification of her father and husband.

6 Tokugon Rihō's biography relates that Nyodai met Wuxue when she was staging prayers for her deceased husband, who is identified as Lord of Echigo, presumed to be Kanazawa Sanetoki 金沢実時 (1224–1276). For a discussion of widows turning to Buddhism, see Ushiyama, "Buddhist convents in Medieval Japan," pp. 131–136.

7 Collcutt, *Five Mountains*, pp. 64–65 and 72.

In 1286 when he saw his death approaching, he gathered his disciples around him in Kamakura, and praising Nyodai's ability to answer Zen *koan* with "three turning words" signifying her true enlightenment, he told the monks that he had passed on his robe and inscribed portrait to her. He recommended her as a model, extolling her vigor and dedication to transmitting his teachings faithfully.⁸ Wuxue went on to announce that he had sent his hair and fingernails to Nyodai, asking her to enshrine them as relics. Nyodai placed these in her Shōmyakuan retreat in north-western Kyoto, transforming it into a mortuary temple for her master.

The actual ritual of passing on the symbols of dharma succession, his personal robe and a self-inscribed portrait, must have been simple and personal. The eight-line Chinese poem Wuxue wrote at the top of the portrait is recorded in the *Bukkō Kokushi goroku*.⁹ The poem traces her growing spiritual capacity through a series of metaphors, comparing, for instance, her dharma eye to a "lightning bolt flashing with confident ease" and ends with "I transmit the final word to you, Mujaku," a pun on Nyodai's alternate name "non-attachment" 無着.¹⁰ Passing on one character in his own name, *mu* 無, was yet another recognition of Nyodai's inheritance.¹¹

Although Nyodai's name appears in some Wuxue lineage charts, none of her female successors do. Since he had several other dharma successors, one might posit that Wuxue hoped she would found a female lineage to parallel a male lineage. He certainly endorsed her founding of the convent Keiaiji. The tradition of parallel male and female Zen institutions was well established in China and other examples of female transmission of relics can be found in Japan.¹²

8 *Bukkō Kokushi goroku*, vol. 9 (*Dai Nihon bukkyō zensho*, vol. 48, p. 162).

9 *Bukkō Kokushi goroku*, vol. 8 (*Dai Nihon bukkyō zensho*, vol. 48, p. 142).

10 The inclusion of the name of the recipient in such a poem is common. Scholars like Yanbe Kōki have used this poem to question whether Mujaku and Mugai were indeed the same person or two people conflated into one. Based on the portrait inscription being labeled as dedicated to "Nun Nyodai of Keiaiji," my inclination is towards agreeing with her early biographers that she was known both as Mugai and Mujaku.

11 Wuxue also passed on a robe and the character "mu" to Mushō Jōshō 無象靜照 (Hōkai Zenshi 法海禪師, 1234–1306). See *Kamakura Engakuji no meihō*, p. 30.

12 For female relics passed down in Japan see Harada, "Nyonin to zenshū," pp. 170 and 179. For parallel convents in the Song dynasty (960–1276) see Levering, *Zen Images, Texts, and Teaching*, ch. 6. In particular, the Chinese nun Miao-tao 妙道 (active ca. 1134–1155) is held up as a model when describing Nyodai. (See the Zekkai Chūshin inscription quoted in the Fister chapter in this volume.) She was a disciple of the Chan master Dahui Zhonggao 大慧宗杲 (1089–1163), who founded her own nunnery and left behind a number of poems and sayings.

Nyodai's Convent Complex, Keiaiji

Undoubtedly Nyodai's the greatest achievement with the longest lasting legacy was the establishment of Keiaiji. A 1286 letter from Nyodai to another of Wuxue's successors, Kōhō Kennichi 高峰顯日 (1241–1316), reaffirms her rights to the convent lands and indicates one of many ways Kennichi supported her endeavors.¹³ In a biography of Nyodai, the abbess of Hōkyōji, Tokugon Rihō 徳嚴理豊 (1672–1745), describes her energetic fund raising, astonishing religious insight, and the strict, austere discipline she established at her convent. With its ordination platform, Keiaiji grew to be a large, well-sustained Zen complex of sub temples and branch temples.¹⁴

As a serious training center for Zen practice where women could meditate for personal enlightenment, the convent stood out among other contemporary nunneries, which were generally devoted to praying for the departed and sutra copying. In the late-Heian and Kamakura periods, women “left the world” (*shukke* 出家) after the loss of a loved one or a severe sickness.¹⁵ Many partially tonsured, or even fully tonsured “nuns” stayed at home, or retired to a villa retreat where they focused on devotional practices and praying for the deceased. Some of these nuns seem to have taken the precepts, but few were formally ordained.¹⁶ Most of these private sanctuaries did not survive long after the death of their founders. A reemergence of convents as communal institutions developed after the wars of the late twelfth century left numerous women widowed. Joining together in communal living provided safety and some financial security. The religious intent, however, remained focused on prayers for the deceased.¹⁷

Nyodai's Keiaiji was, thus, distinct. Her own personality must have driven its orthodox principles of austerity, simplicity, and practice.¹⁸ In her last years, she retired to Shōmyakuan, passing on the *kesa* and Wuxue's portrait as a part

13 *Mugai Nyodai jihitsu uzurijo*, 1286. Kōhō Kennichi was the second son of Emperor Gosaga 後嵯峨天皇 (1220–1272; r. 1242–1246). Kennichi studied under Zen masters Enni Ben'en 圓爾辯圓 (1202–1280), Wuan Puning (Jp: Gotta Funei 兀菴普寧, 1197–1276), and Wuxue Zuyuan. Musō Soseki 夢窓疎石 (1275–1351) was one of his many disciples.

14 Arakawa, “Keiaiji no enkaku,” p. 63.

15 See Arakawa, “Keiaiji no enkaku,” pp. 57–69. Ushiyama, “Buddhist Convents in Medieval Japan,” pp. 131–164.

16 Ushiyama, “Buddhist Convents in Medieval Japan,” pp. 132–133.

17 Ushiyama, “Buddhist Convents in Medieval Japan,” p. 136.

18 Zekkai Chūshin's 絶海中津 (1334–1405) poem written for her hundredth death anniversary describes her as following the principles of Zen Master Desan (Tokusan), while Tokusan

of the investiture rituals for the next abbess, Gettei Munin 月庭無忍 (dates unknown). As time passed, the meaning of the robe and the investiture ritual evolved. It is possible to extrapolate something of this development from a document preserved at Hōkyōji, a chart labeled “Transmission Succession for the Buddhist Robe,” 法衣相羨次第 with an addendum in smaller *kanji* reading: “and for those who do not receive the robe but become abbesses of Keiai-ji”¹⁹ (fig. 8.2). This is the oldest record confirming the names of the abbesses and one of only a handful of original documents still extant from the convent. Although no dates and little information are given for each person named, it is clear from the chart that while passing on the dharma teachings as embodied in the *kesa* lay at the core of the succession, eventually the transmission of the robe ceased to be a prerequisite for becoming abbess. At the same time, the possession of the robe took on new socially symbolic value. A number of scholars have tried to identify the individuals listed in the lineage, and in tracing the passage of Nyodai’s surplice I have relied heavily on their work, though many conflicting and dubious points remain.²⁰

Tracing the Transmission of Nyodai’s *Kesa*

The chart spans some 180 years from Wuxue and Mugai Nyodai in the late thirteenth century to the mid-fifteenth century nun Madenokōji Jishō 万里小路慈照 (b. 1427), who probably compiled the chart. These 180 years can be divided into three phases: (1) Keiai-ji as a privately sponsored convent for strict Zen training and ordination (late 13th, early 14th century), (2) Keiai-ji weathering the upheavals of the Nanbokuchō era (1336–1392), and (3) Keiai-ji as leader of the government-patronized and controlled “Five Mountain Convent” system or Amagozan/Amadera Gozan 尼五山/尼寺五山 (mid-to-late 14th–15th century). In 1498 Keiai-ji burned down and lacked the finances to be rebuilt. Some of the sub and branch temples of Keiai-ji, however, having been founded by imperial, noble, or Ashikaga-related women were destined to become “nun’s palaces” or *bikuni gosho* 比丘尼御所 in the sixteenth century. Three of these Keiai-ji nun’s

gon Rihō in her biography describes Nyodai throwing out all the statues to clear the hall for meditation.

- 19 *Hōe shōshō shidai*, Hōkyōji documents, probably written in or shortly before 1455.
 20 Arakawa, “Keiai-ji no enkaku,” pp. 57–69; Yanbe, “Mugai Nyodai no sōken jiin,” pp. 1–14 and “Nyodai enyū no jiin to Muromachi bakufu,” pp. 561–579; Harada, “Nyonin to zenshū,” pp. 140–180; and Oka, “Kinyo no bikuni gosho, Hōkyōji o chūshin ni,” Vol. 42.2, pp. 30–60 and Vol. 44.2, pp. 1–40.



FIGURE 8.2 “Transmission Succession for the Buddhist Robe” (a line connects the names of each successive recipient of the kesa), ca. 1450s, Hōkyōji archives

SOURCE: PHOTO COURTESY OF NARA NATIONAL MUSEUM

palaces survived the Warring States period (1466–1576) and carried on the head convent’s legacy: Daishōji, Hōkyōji, and Hōjiin 宝慈院.

Phase One

During the first thirty to forty years, the authority and the transmission of Nyodai’s *kesa* reflected commitment to perpetuating the Buddhist precepts through convent activities (fig. 8.3). Investiture as abbess and possession of the symbols of dharma transmission were equivalents. After passing from “Bukō Zenshi” 仏光禪師 (Wuxue Zuyuan) to “Keiaiji Kaisan Nyodai Oshō” 景愛寺開山如大和尚 [Keiaiji Founder, Abbess Nyodai], the *kesa* was then passed on to four abbesses in succession, up until number five, Tōhō E’nichi 東峯惠日 (dates unknown, mid-fourteenth century). These women were probably her direct disciples, or their disciples.²¹ Although the transmission chart lists nothing more than their names, a lineage chart of Hōkyōji abbesses that incorporates

21 An affirmation of the religious respect given the early abbesses at Keiaiji can be read into

Phase one Keiaiji abbesses as shown in the lineage chart
<p>“Bukkō Zenshi” 仏光禪師 (Wuxue Zuyuan)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. “Keiaiji Kaisan Nyodai Oshō” 景愛寺開山如大和尚 [Keiaiji Founder, Abbess Nyodai] 2. Gettei Munin [月庭] 無忍 3. Nyoutsu / Nyokū 如空 4. Kohō Keishū 孤峯惠秀 [dies before 1342] [this is evidenced by the fact that her grave was moved to Shōmyakuan before Shinnyoji was founded in 1342] 5. Tōhō E'nichi 東峯惠日 [dies after 1354; passes <i>kesa</i> to # 8, Karin Egon]

FIGURE 8.3 *Lineage of phase one Keiaiji abbesses*

the early Keiaiji abbesses provides further information.²² All four nuns seem to have been daughters of the elite Hino family, and were thus sisters, aunts, mothers, and cousins of high-ranking women serving the emperor. Absence of birth and death dates makes it difficult to pinpoint the times of their residences. An end date, however, can be found in the fifth abbess's *Will of the Nun Tōhō E'nichi* 東峰惠日尼自筆置文 (*Tōhō E'nichi ni jihitsu okibumi*) in her own hand and dated 1354, which has instructions for the future of Keiaiji.²³

E'nichi's will stipulates that both the *kesa* and the abbacy should be passed on to Karin Egon 華林惠嚴 (d. 1386). From the transmission chart we can see that this transferal bypassed two abbesses, who never received the *kesa* and about whom we know nothing. Thus Karin Egon became the eighth abbess, sixth recipient of the *kesa*, and additionally she was the founder of Hōkyōji branch temple.

a document in which Musō Soseki requested the transfer of the graves or stupas for Nyodai, and also for the fourth Keiaiji abbess Kohō Keishū 孤峰惠秀 (dates unknown, mid-fourteenth century), to Shōmyakuan shortly before he converted Shōmyakuan into the temple Shinnyoji 真如寺. Yanbe interprets this as appropriating a direct lineage extending back to Wuxue; see “Nyodai enyū no jiin to Muromachi bakufu,” pp. 565–566.

22 *Hōkyōji keifu; Keiaiji godaidai* 宝鏡寺系譜、景愛寺御代々, Hōkyōji archives. Oka, “Kinyo no bikuni gosho,” pp. 35–56, suggests that the version known today dates to a nineteenth-century revised version of this genealogy by Hongakuin no miya (Tokugon Riho) titled, *Ama Gozan Keiaiji denkei Seizan Hōkyōji teidai keifu jiseki* 景愛寺伝系西山法鏡寺通代系譜事跡 (Traces of a genealogy of successive generations of Seizan Hōkyōji, descended from Ama Gozan Keiaiji). See also Yamamoto, *Visual and Material Culture at Hōkyōji Imperial Convent*.

23 Bunwa 文和 3. *Tōhō E'nichi-ni jihitsu okibumi* 東峰惠日尼自筆置文, Miho Museum.

Phase Two

Why two abbesses did not receive the *kesa* and portrait remains buried in history, though it does reflect a separation of religious transmission (*kesa* and portrait) from administrative leadership (abbess) (fig. 8.4). The answer might lie in the state of the nation during their abbacies. It is likely that the two women who did not receive the *kesa* would have been abbesses between the 1330s and the early 1350s—a time of political unrest that saw major power shifts with many reversals, families abolished, land confiscated, and loyalties split along several lines: southern versus northern emperors, military versus imperial court, and orthodox religious sects versus newly established ones.²⁴ Tōhō E'nichi's letter refers to “several quarrels,” presumably the Kannō disturbance (*Kannō jōran*, 觀応擾乱 1350–1351) and its aftermath.²⁵ In light of this, she claims to have placed the most important documents in the “hands of others” and laments that “women, being inexperienced, need guidance in worldly affairs.”²⁶ The woman to whom Tōhō E'nichi (who presumably had kept the *kesa* after retiring from being abbess)²⁷ saw fit to pass on the *kesa* was clearly aligned with the rising order: Karin Egon was the daughter of the Ashikaga 足利-supported Northern Emperor Kōgon 光嚴天皇 (1313–1364; r. 1331–1333) and a disciple of Musō Soseki 夢窓疎石 (1275–1351).²⁸

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- 24 For a detailed discussion of the Nanbokuchō wars and their effect on the social, economic, and political structure of Japan, see Conlan, *State of War*.
- 25 In the early years of the Ashikaga shogunate, the brothers Takauji 尊氏 (1305–1358) and Tadayoshi 直義 (1306–1352) ruled together, but due to differences of policy they came to loggerheads in 1350. After Takauji's deputy, Kō no Moronao 高師直 (d. 1351) forced Tadayoshi to become a priest under Musō Soseki (1349), Tadayoshi took revenge and the two brothers waged battle against each other. The internal fighting weakened the Ashikaga shogunate sufficiently that it led to a brief revival (1351–1354) of the Southern Imperial line's power, to whom Tadayoshi and others had defected. Ultimately Takauji emerged victorious and in sole control.
- 26 At the time the resident abbot of Ungoan 雲居庵 at Tenryūji 天龍寺 was either Mukyoku Shigen 無極志玄 (1282–1359), the second abbot, or Shun'oku Myōha 春屋妙葩 (1312–1388), the third. The close connection with Tenryūji may also be related to the fact that Karin Egon was tonsured by Musō Soseki.
- 27 *Hōkyōji monjo* of Kōei 康永 2 (1343).2, names an E'nichi Hall (*hattō* 法堂) with an address close to Keiaiji, presumably E'nichi's retirement temple. See Yanbe, “Nyodai enyū no jiin to Muromachi bakufu,” p. 568.
- 28 The Meiji records of Hōkyōji abbesses note Karin Egon's father and her mentor. After being in Hōjiin she became eighth abbess of Keiaiji. She then was granted the privilege to wear purple robes and next received the *kesa* and portrait that had been passed down from Nyodai through six generations. Later she was at Kenpuku Convent and then founded

Phase two Keiaiji abbesses as shown in the lineage chart
<p>5. Tōhō E'nichi 東峯恵日 [passes <i>kesa</i> to # 8, Karin Egon]</p> <p>– (6) Tekkan 徹関</p> <p>– (7) Mudan 無般</p> <p>6. (8) Karin Egon 華林恵嚴 (d. 1386)</p>

FIGURE 8.4 Lineage of phase two Keiaiji abbesses

Tōhō E'nichi's will also sheds light on ways in which Keiaiji convent had evolved along with the emergence of the Kyoto "Five Mountain" system. Following the Chinese model, which ranked the newly founded Zen temples and tied them to a nationwide network of temples, select Zen monasteries served the state, receiving support—but also supervision—from the shogunate. In Kyoto, Musō Soseki, a disciple of Kōhō Kennichi, who in turn was a disciple of Bukkō Kokushi (Wuxue), worked with the early Ashikaga shoguns to build up the Kyoto *gozan* system. One of the temples Soseki founded was Tenryūji (1344), and it was to the resident abbot of a sub-temple (Ungoan 雲居庵) at Tenryūji that the nun Tōhō E'nichi recommended the nuns of Keiaiji turn when in need of help. Yanbe posits that the abbot was Shun'oku Myōha 春屋妙葩 (1311–1388), a disciple of Soseki who was instrumental in elevating the image of Mugai Nyodai and who encouraged a number of other women on their religious paths.²⁹

Phase Three

The creation of the "Five Mountain Convents" probably evolved slowly, its last member, Tsūgenji 通玄寺, being founded only in 1380. Keiaiji was ranked at the top (fig. 8.5). Prestigious as this was, it also meant that the shogun appointed the abbesses, as he did the abbots of Five Mountain temples, and thus he had tight-control of their activities.³⁰ According to the system, the various sub and branch convents presented the Shogun with a list from which he chose the

Seizan Hōkyōji, which at the time was situated near Tenryūji and the western mountains of Kyoto. See Harada, "Nyonin to zenshū," p. 150. A *kesa* that Myōha presented to Abbess Chisen Shintsū 智泉聖通 (1309–1388) evidences his support of the founder of Tsūgenji 通玄寺, the last convent to be designated as one of the Five Mountain convents.

29 See Nishiyama, "Nisō no 'seichi' toshite no Shinnyoji," pp. 224–225. See also Harada, "Nyonin to zenshū," pp. 153–155.

30 When a chosen nun refused to take the abbacy, another was chosen by lottery from former abbesses of Keiaiji and of sub and branch temples. See Arakawa, "Keiaiji no enkaku,"

most suitable candidate. This politicization may be why, according to the *kesa* transmission chart, four imperial daughters, none of whom receive the *kesa*, follow Karin Egon.³¹

The next recipient of the *kesa* was Kyōmuro Eshō 鏡室恵照 (d. 1414). The Hōkyōji lineage identifies her as the third daughter of the Minister of Interior Hirohashi Kanenobu 広橋兼宣 (1366–1429). Like most Keiaiji abbesses, she moved around among the sub-temples. Having earlier obtained permission from Karin Egon, she built a sub-temple on Itsutsuji street next to Keiaiji in 1394 and named it Kenshōin.³² She then moved on to Hōkyōji. When she was appointed abbess of Keiaiji itself, she received the robe and portrait. The robe had apparently been “kept in a secret place” after the death of Karin Egon.³³ Sometime in the early fifteenth century, the robe and portrait were deposited in the newly founded Kenshōin. This is indicated in the transmission chart with a branch line and the comment, “the *kesa* leaves the main Keiaiji precincts.”

With Abbess Eshō we enter a time of greater stability. Ashikaga Yoshimitsu 足利義満 (1358–1408, r. 1368–1394), the most powerful of the Ashikaga shoguns, had finally established peace between the northern and southern imperial lines (1392). He built Shōkokuji (1382) as a head Five Mountain temple and finalized details in the Five Mountain administration (1386).

The position of women had also changed. In the Kamakura period when Nyodai founded Keiaiji, elite women had considerable inheritance rights. For instance, according to a Hōkyōji document dated 1277 signed by “Rihō 理宝,” her wealth was great enough that she provided the land for Keiaiji as well as the *shōen* 荘園 tax estates to support it.³⁴ Hōkyōji and Daishōji ascribe Rihō to

pp. 63–64. In her letter E'nichi warns against allowing just anyone to enter the convent, even if they are relatives of people already installed.

31 The shogunal right of intervention can also be seen in a much later edict, the *Nakagata Chūsei hōsho* 仲方中正奉書 dated 1431 (Eikyō 永享 3) where the shogunate ordered that the *kesa* and portrait with Wuxue's inscription to be removed from Keiaiji and placed in the sub-temple of Kenshōin. Hokyōji archives. Nakagata Chūsei 仲方中正 (1373–1451) was a Rinzaï priest and administrator at Shōkokuji who transmitted missives and made announcements (*dentatsu hirō* 伝達披露) for Ashikaga Yoshimochi 足利義持 (1386–1428). See also Harada, “Nyonin to zenshū,” p. 161.

32 Yanbe, “Mugai Nyodai sōritsu jiin,” p. 9. As Karin Egon is thought to have died in 1386, a number of years must have passed between Eshō's obtaining permission and then actually constructing Kenshōin, or perhaps construction was started, but then stopped for some reason, and it wasn't completed until later.

33 Inoguchi, *Amamonzeki no gengo seikatsu*, p. 29.

34 *Rihō kishin jōan* 理寶寄進狀案 (Rihō's [Land] Donation Missive) (Kenji 建治 3 [1277], Hōkyōji archives) states that “The donated land was imperial for a long time and located

Phase three Keiaiji abbesses as shown in the lineage chart
9. Rishū 理秀—daughter of Emperor Go-Kōmatsu 後小松天皇 (r. 1377–1433; r. 1382–1412)
10. Rien 理遠—daughter of Emperor Shōko 称光天皇 (1401–1428; r. 1412–1428)
11. Rikō 理高—daughter of Emperor Go-Hanazono 後花園天皇 (1419–1471; r. 1428–1464)
12. Rishū 理秀—attributed to be the daughter of Emperor Go-Tsuchimikado 土御門天皇 (r. 1442–1500; 1464–1500) [given that the dates do not match, however, this attribution is unlikely]

FIGURE 8.5 Lineage of phase three Keiaiji abbesses

be Imabayashi (Fujiwara) no Sadako 藤原貞子 (1196–1302), the wife of Saionji Saneuji 西園寺実氏 (1194–1269) and mother of the principle consort of the Emperor Gosaga 後嵯峨 (1220–1272, r. 1242–1248). A document in Daishōji in Nyodai's hand mentioning [Kōhō] Kennichi and his verifying the land grant gives credence to this attribution, as he was the second son of Gosaga and “Rihō” would have been his step grandmother.³⁵

Over the next century, wars and warrior government engendered new approaches to land distribution and bolstered the family (*ie* 家) system. Gradually the independence of elite women was undermined and for many their property came to be transferred into their husband's family on marriage.³⁶ Additionally, during the Nanbokuchō era, the divided court led to a loss of the *shōen* property that formed the imperial court's economic backing. On the one hand, there were fewer and fewer jobs for elite women within the court.³⁷ On the other, convents founded by single or groups of bereaved women were now institutions with landed property rights. As the highest-ranking Five Mountain Convent, Keiaiji with its fifteen sub and branch temples offered women from aristocratic families a viable alternative to marriage or court service.

on Itsutsuji but is given to “Nyodai-bō” for the purpose of building a convent.” Published in *Josei to Bukkyō* as item 158. See also discussion on p. 247.

35 *Mugai Nyodai jihitsu uzurijo*, 1286. Daishōji archives.

36 A concise discussion of changing circumstances for elite women can be found in Laffin, *Rewriting Medieval Japanese Women*, pp. 6–8.

37 For a discussion of the financial straits of the court aristocracy in the fifteenth century, see Butler, *Emperor and Aristocracy in Japan*, pp. 24–26.

By the fifteenth century elite parents were sending their unmarried daughters to Keiaiji and other convents as a way to provide for them. This began a trend that in the Edo period led emperors and regental families to place their daughters, often at a young age, in select nun's palaces. A fringe benefit was family control of the convent.

Investiture Rituals and the Symbolic Capital of Nyodai's Transmission *Kesa*

Kenshōin, where the *kesa* was retained through several abbacies, is an example of family dominance. We know something of the circumstances by which Kenshōin came to house successive abbesses from the same family through the diary of the courtier Madenokōji Tokifusa 万里小路時房 (1395–1457), *Kennaiki* 建内記 (Record of Inner Minister Madenokōji Tokifusa; Buddhist name Kenshōin). He was brother of the eighth recipient of the *kesa*, Tōdō Etsū 徹堂恵通 (d. 1422?),³⁸ and father of both the ninth and tenth recipients, Jishun 慈俊 (dates unknown) and Jishō.³⁹ Various issues led to Jishun retiring and Jishō taking the tonsure.⁴⁰ On that occasion Jishō received the “Bukkō Kokushi” *kesa*.⁴¹ Her father noted the event in the following entry to his diary. Sections enclosed in brackets are his explanatory notes.

Bun'an 4 [1447].4.14
Today acolyte Jishō

[She became an acolyte (*kasshiki*) at age 15 on 1441.10.27 at the mortuary site of Bukkō Kokushi under the previous Kenni Seiten Keiai Prelate.]

38 The date is calculated from her brother, Madenokōji Tokifusa's, diary *Kennaiki* entry for Ōei 応永 29 (1428).5.7, which notes her seventh death anniversary. She became the second abbess of Kenshōin in Ōei 25 (1418). Madenokōji Tsugufusa 万里小路嗣房 (1341–1401) was father to both Tokifusa and Etsū, who also shared the same mother.

39 Jishō's birth date is calculated from the *Kennaiki* note that she was 15 in Kakitsu 嘉吉 1 (1441).

40 For details on the politics behind Jishō's tonsure, see Yanbe, “Mugai Nyodai no sōken jiin,” pp. 9–10.

41 Madenokōji Tokifusa, *Kennaiki* 建内記, entry for Bun'an 文案 4 (1447).4.14, pp. 78–79.

became a full nun [*bikuni*]. Ōgoshō⁴² provided the money. Various people attended Jishō as she went in her palanquin to Sōjuin at Shōkokuji, where Seiten is head priest.

Bukkō Kokushi's portrait with his own inscription and his Buddhist robe were on display. Her head was shaved, she received the robe

[The Buddhist robe is a nine-panel robe from Bukkō Kokushi: a transmission *kesa*. A seven-panel *kesa*, five-panel *kesa*, and prayer cloth (*zagu*), as well as the bowl (*hachi*) were all from Seiten. Actually the ceremony should have been at Shōmyakuin, but Ōgoshō wished to have it here.]

and the wood blade. Ōgoshō presented [Jishō] with a gift of a thousand *hiki*.⁴³ The attendants presented her with a *kosode* [kimono of glossed plain weave silk *nerinuki*], a razor, and a *katabira*.⁴⁴ The recipient thanked them properly in perfect form.

The gifts cover the preparations for the ceremony, like the *kesa*⁴⁵ and other garments. They amount to two thousand *hiki* all together. One thousand is a donation, and one thousand I will return to the person from whom I borrowed money for the ceremony, the details of which are noted in a previous entry.

The nun [Jishō] then prepared to retire. She went to pay respects to Ōgoshō and also gave her thanks to various other people.

On the next day, she came to be the owner of the collected garments and the Sacred Robe. This robe is a seed, a rare treasure that has been passed down through successive hands from Nyodai to Jishō. The saying goes, that when one child takes the tonsure, mother and father achieve salvation. There is surely no greater wish between two generations.

The details of the lavish investiture ceremony include a retinue of attendants enhancing the novice's progression to the site, attendance by high-ranking lay people, and extensive gifts. Indeed, the financing for Jishō's investiture seems to have taxed her father, Tokifusa's, purse to the extent that he borrowed money

42 Ōgoshō is generally a reference to the shogun. Here, however, the note identifies the person as Ashikaga Yoshimochi's later consort, Sanjō Tadako 三条尹子, listed here by her name in retirement, Zuishun-in. See also Yanbe "Mugai Nyodai no sōken jiin," p. 9.

43 *Hiki* is a monetary unit worth 10 *mon*.

44 A *katabira* is a *henpen* summer kimono.

45 This refers to *kesa* she and others wore, not the transmission *kesa* she received.

for the occasion and was grateful for the proceeds being sufficient to promptly pay back the loan. He is very beholden to Ōgosho, who seems to have masterminded the whole ceremony. Apparently Tokifusa was not the only aristocrat hard put to finance his daughter's entrance into a convent. Arakawa has identified a number of elite fathers who needed to borrow money to defray the expense of placing a daughter in a religious institution.⁴⁶

Of further note is that Tokifusa refers to the *kesa* as Wuxue's during the public ceremony, but as Mugai Nyodai's the next day when, as Jishō's father, he privately rejoices in the marvel of his daughter possessing it. This shift between public and private highlights the importance of the grand Zen master Wuxue, who stands as a cornerstone authenticating Nyodai, and the more immediate, intimate association with the woman, Nyodai. A similar scenario surrounds Nyodai's retreat, Shōmyakuin, which was both Wuxue's and Nyodai's mortuary temple and which served as the standard site (Tokifusa tells us) for Keiaiji investitures. Jishō had her investiture as a novice (*kasshiki* 喝食 ceremony) there. Shōmyakuin is also destined to be the resting place for the *kesa*.

Jishō, despite her elaborate investiture receiving the *kesa*, does not seem to have felt compelled to pass it on to a successor. Hers is the last name on the transmission chart, which is followed by a separate document that states she is transferring the *kesa* to Shōmyakuin.⁴⁷ So in 1455, twelve years before the Ōnin wars (1467–1477), the *kesa* that had been transmitted through a line of nuns was laid to rest in the founder's retreat and mortuary temple for her teacher.

Tokifusa's diary passage not only gives us a glimpse of the tonsure ceremony, it also is the first time we get any concrete information about the type of *kesa* passed down. It was described as a "nine-panel" (*kujō* 九條) *kesa*, which was standard for Rinzaï Zen transmission *kesa*. In the following section I will detail the various forms and styles of *kesa* in an attempt to connect the lines between the transmission *kesa* and the yellow *kesa* introduced at the beginning of the essay as being associated with Mugai Nyodai.

Documentation for the Shōkokuji's *Kesa* Associated with Nyodai

The yellow Shōkokuji *kesa* is stored in a plain wood box with Mugai Nyodai's name inscribed on the lid and the following passage on the inside of the lid (fig. 8.6).

46 Arakawa, "Keiaiji no enkaku," pp. 64–65.

47 *Jishō yuzurijō an*, Kōshō 3 (1457).8.15, Hōkyōji archives. Note Shōmyakuan and Shōmyakuin are the same place.



FIGURE 8.6 *Inscription inside of the lid of Nyodai's kesa box, 1798, Shōkokuji*
SOURCE: AUTHOR PHOTO. USED WITH KIND PERMISSION
OF SHŌKOKUJI

One *kesa* of chief prelate Mugai Nyodai

This has been kept as a secret treasure in our temple for a long time

Now, we are offering it to the home temple [Shōmyakuan]

in honor of Nyodai's 500th-death anniversary

Long may it serve Shōmyaku as a solemn ornament (*shōgon*)

Kansei 9 [1797] [abbot of] Chōtoku[in], Emon⁴⁸

48 The content of the inscription also appears in the *Sangaryō nikki*. See *Shōkokuji shiryō*, vol. 7, pp. 289–292, which mentions that it was conserved for the occasion.

In other words, for the 500th anniversary of Nyodai's death the yellow *kesa* was presented to the temple of Shōmyakuan/ Shōmyakuin, the mortuary temple for both Wuxue Zuyuan and Mugai Nyodai. The box lid states that the *kesa* is being sent from Chōtokuin 長得院, a sub-temple of Shōkokuji. Since it is common to display a *kesa* worn by a deceased prelate as a part of the rituals attending special memorial anniversaries (*onki* 遠忌), the offering of this *kesa* must have greatly enhanced the occasion. Since at one time the transmission *kesa* was stored at Shōmyakuan, this may be a return rather than a loan or permanent offer.

The box also contains verification slips that affirm the authenticity of the yellow *kesa*. One verification is written by Gakuin Ekatsu 鄂隱慧叡 (also known as Busui Seizoku Kokushi 仏慧正統国師, 1357–1425), who founded Chōtokuin in 1410 and became abbot of Shōkokuji in 1414.⁴⁹ It is very similar to other verification slips with his name: hand and insignia being the same.⁵⁰ So in the early fifteenth century, this *kesa*, or at least a *kesa* that passed through Gakuin Ekatsu's hands, was authenticated as Mugai Nyodai's.

The Transmission *Kesa* and the Identity of the Yellow Shōkokuji *Kesa*

The only physical description of the Wuxue-Nyodai transmission *kesa* so far is that it is a nine-panel *kesa* (fig. 8.7). This description corresponds to the yellow *kesa* at Shōkokuji designated as associated with Nyodai. That does not, however, guarantee that they are one and the same. The verification slip for the yellow *kesa* written by Gakuin Ekatsu presumably dates to sometime close to 1410. From the succession chart, it is clear that at that time the transmission *kesa* was still within the Keiaiji complex, either in the main temple or in the Kenshōin sub-temple. It may have needed verification for other reasons than long-term storage.

To contextualize this kind of authentication, I turn to one of Gakuin Ekatsu's own *kesa*. This was stored in a box with a lengthy inscription and a verification tag very similar to the one for the yellow *kesa*.⁵¹ The end of the inscription

49 Gakuin Ekatsu was a disciple of Zekkai Chūshin. He studied in China between 1386–1396, was a poet of *gozan* literature and became abbot of Shōkokuji after his return to Japan. He was also teacher of the founder of Jijūin Imperial convent, Chikutei Jōken 竹庭淨賢 (1390–1431).

50 Another example lies in the box storing Gakuin Ekatsu's own *kesa*. See below.

51 The box and Gakuin Ekatsu's *kesa* are presently stored at Kyoto National Museum.

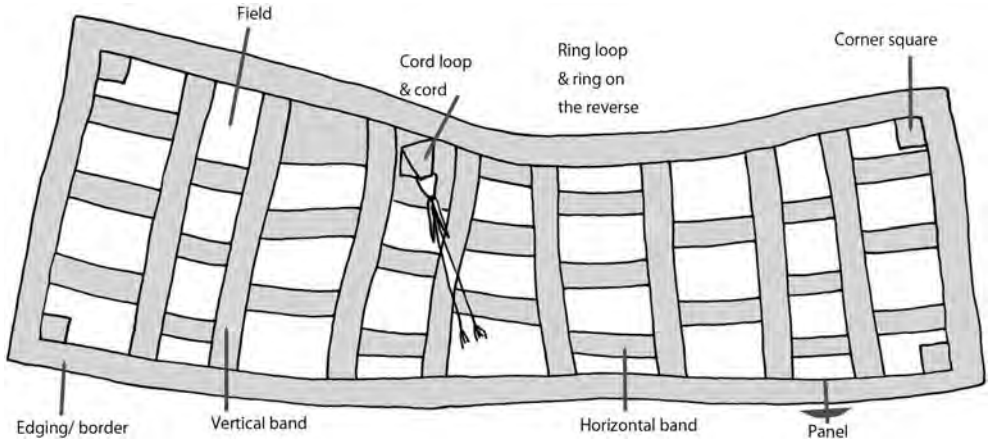


FIGURE 8.7 Sketch identifying the parts of a Rinzai Zen nine-panel kesa

SOURCE: AUTHOR DRAWING

has an addendum stating that the extra item in the box is a black seven-panel gauze-weave (*mojiri-ori* or “crossed warps”) *kesa* belonging to Nyodai and presented by Shinnyoji (Shōmyakuin) to Chōtokuin. Since it was a seven-panel *kesa*, this black *kesa* would not correspond to the nine-panel transmission *kesa* as described in the *Kennaiki*: at least two *kesa* associated with Nyodai were in Shōmyakuin.

The rest of the box inscription relates the story of Gakuin Ekatsu’s *kesa*, shedding light on the value, perpetuation, and replication of *kesa*. After identifying the weave (gold brocading, *kinran*), color (red and blue), and ring (ivory), it goes on to say:

This is the same *kesa* mentioned in Kinsen’s diary. According to the diary, in the intercalary fifth month of Bunmei 19 [1487], Jishō Sōkō (Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimasa) had the priest Imei Zuichi hold *gyakushū* ceremonies (death rituals before you die) for 100 days. During the lectures on Buddhism, the shogun asked about the *kesa*. The answer was, it had been passed on from the previous priest, Busui Seizoku Kokushi [Gakuin Ekatsu]. The shogun wanted the *kesa* to give it to Ōsen Keisan [横川], so he had it replicated. In Keian 3 [1650], Tōfukumon-in presented another copy of this *kesa* to Kinshuku Kentaku to commemorate the 300th death anniversary of Musō Kokushi [Musō Soseki].

The inscription on the lid of Gakuin Ekatsu’s *kesa* box not only indicates that two hundred years after her death more than one *kesa* was associated with Nyo-

dai but also elucidates an appreciation of *kesa* for their aesthetic appeal that spurs their replication. When, why and whether the Wuxue-Nyodai *kesa* was transferred from Shōmyakuin to Shōkokuji's Chōtokuin needs more research.

The earliest document clearly identifying the yellow *kesa* ascribed today to Nyodai by its color, weave, and pattern is a Shōkokuji reference to a *kesa* that was used in the 300th death anniversary rites for Musō Soseki in 1651.⁵² The robe is identified as, "Founder's Buddhist robe (*hōe* 法衣), yellow, bands of gauze weave with peony design, ground of *hokken* silk, ring of water buffalo."⁵³ Every item in this description fits the yellow *kesa* that is now stored as Mugai Nyodai's in a box claiming it was sent to Shōmyakuin for her 500th death anniversary (see fig. 8.1). Of course there is the possibility that when Musō Soseki converted Shōmyakuin into Shinnyoji monastery, he wore a *kesa* that had been Nyodai's, symbolically affirming his link to the place and through her to Wuxue. The *kesa* would then have "belonged" to both of them, though it could not have been the transmission *kesa*, as that was kept at Kaiiji. Without relegating this apparent mix-up to yet one more appropriation of Nyodai's identity by Musō Soseki, we might investigate other ways the confusion could have occurred.

Let us presume for a moment that this *kesa* is, indeed, Nyodai's transmission *kesa* and that someone at Shinnyoji-Shōmyakuin, founded by Musō, transferred it to the head monastery Shōkokuji along with other articles, including perhaps a *kesa* that really did belong to Musō.⁵⁴ These were deposited at Chōtokuin for safe-keeping, and a hundred years later the *kesa* was presumed to be Musō's. The attribution slip was then found, matched with a now-lost record, and the identification straightened out.

Another scenario might point to replication and refashioning, as suggested by the Egatsu *kesa* inscription quoted above. The yellow *kesa* associated with either or both Mugai Nyodai and Musō Soseki consists of three different materials, all of which have been associated by textile historians to dates later the thirteenth century, but none of them technically impossible to have been produced that early. A detailed analysis follows.

52 See *Shōkokuji Shiryō*, vol. 2, p. 232.

53 This description lies in the box lid, but is also recorded in the Shōkokuji Records.

54 In fact, a *kesa* of the same color and similar, but not identical, gauze weave with Musō's name inscribed in ink is also preserved at Shōkokuji. The boxes for these two *kesa* were seemingly mixed up when the Mugai Nyodai *kesa* was taken out to show the abbesses in 2007.

A Textile Perspective

The 1651 description of the yellow *kesa* describes it as having “bands of gauze weave (*sha* 紗) with peony design.” *Sha* refers to an open weave where adjacent warps cross and uncross as successive wefts are passed between their sheds. In this case there is a pattern, so more accurately one would call it a “patterned simple gauze” (*monsha* 文紗).⁵⁵

The pattern area, or *monsha*, was created by leaving the warps uncrossed in certain places. The resultant plain weave (not crossed) area appeared solid against the open holes created by the crossed warps. In the Song dynasty, the Chinese began to weave these crossing and uncrossing gauze structures with three rather than two warps crossing. In Japan this weave structure is called *kenmonsha*. The bands of the yellow *kesa* in question have a peony pattern in *kenmonsha*.

Extensive investigation of just how the three warps in *kenmonsha* cross each other and then create pattern areas where they do not cross revealed that five different methods were used (table 8.1).⁵⁶ Three of these weave structures are recorded by Chinese textile historians and are well documented.⁵⁷ One of the three Chinese weave structures is found on many of the *kesa* brought to Japan by immigrant Chinese monks and by Japanese monks returning from China. A fourth structure has so far only been found in Japan, the earliest examples dating from the fourteenth century.⁵⁸ The bands of the yellow *kesa* in Shōkokuji were woven with a fifth structure, one that became the dominant structure used from the late fifteenth century on in Japan. A sixteenth-century *meibutsugire* 名物裂 purportedly imported from China also has this fifth structure, but to date I have not yet found any other Chinese examples.

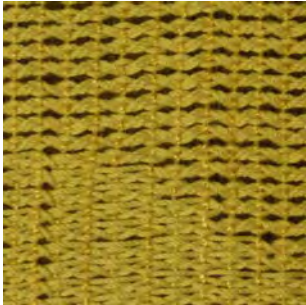
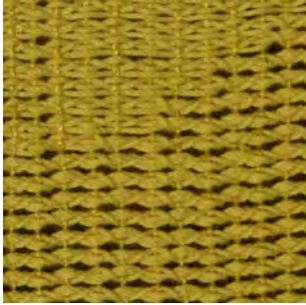
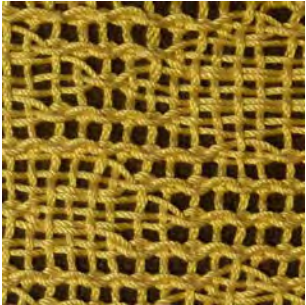
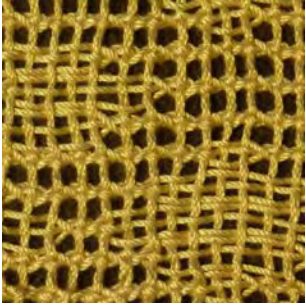
55 In China *sa* 沙 often refers to loosely woven plain weave or to unpatterned two-end crossed-warp weave, while in Japan the character for *sha* 沙 signifies two warps crossing and uncrossing. Chinese often refer to patterned crossed-warp weaves as *luo* 羅, while in Japan *ra* 羅 refers specifically to four-end crossed warps that form a net-like pattern, whether or not they incorporate a pattern. Patterned three-end crossed warp (gauze) weaves are also called *luo* in China, but *kenmonsha* 顯文紗 in Japanese.

56 See Bethe, “*Kenmonsha* or patterned three-end gauze,” pp. x–xiv.

57 See Kuhn and Zhao, “*Chinese Silks*,” p. 525.

58 These include *kesa* owned by Musō Soseki and a *kesa* owned by Abbess Chisen Shintsū, the founder of the Tsūgenji Five Mountain convent, that were received from Shun'oku Myōha.

TABLE 8.1 Five different types of patterned, 3-end gauze weave structures

Weave structure	Type	Place	Period	Characteristics	Up-doup face: warp 1 pulled under & up	Down-doup face: warp 1 pulled over & down
variation of 2-end gauze	1	China	Han/Song	Ground: warp 1 crosses warps 2 + 3 Pattern: warp 3 released from cross		
Crossing evenly spaced. Pattern: plain weave.	2	China/ Korea	S Song	Ground: warp 1 crosses and uncrosses with each weft. Warps 2&3= plain weave Pattern: plain weave, but warp 1 and 2 parallel		





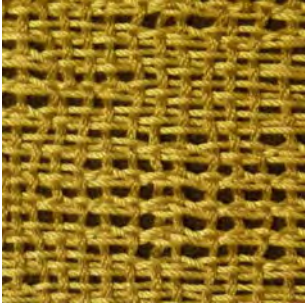

Weave structure	Type	Place	Period	Characteristics	Up-doup face: warp 1 pulled under & up	Down-doup face: warp 1 pulled over & down
Crossing creates grouping of 3 wefts Pattern: twill	3	China/ Korea/ Japan	S. Song/ Kamakura/ Nanbokuchō	Ground: warp 1 crosses every 3rd weft. Warps 2 & 3 = twill. Pattern: twill		
Crossing creates grouping of 1 then 2 wefts. Pattern: twill	4	Japan	Nanbokuō Muromachi	Ground: warp 1 crosses and stays crossed for 2 wefts. Warps 2 & 3 = twill Pattern: twill		

TABLE 8.1 Five different types of patterned, 3-end gauze weave structures (cont.)

Weave structure	Type	Place	Period	Characteristics	Up-doup face: warp 1 pulled under & up	Down-doup face: warp 1 pulled over & down
Crossing evenly spaced. Pattern looks like plain weave on one side, satin weave on the other	5	Japan/ China?	Kamakura? Nanbokuō~ / Ming?	Ground: Warp 1 crosses with each weft shot Warps 2 & 3 alternate passing under 3 wefts and over 1 weft. Pattern: Warp 1 in plain weave, Warps 2 & 3 alternate completing the plain weave.		

Exactly when and where this fifth structure was developed needs further research. Despite its later popularity, circumstantial evidence suggests it may have been produced already in the thirteenth century. Several *kesa* stored at Tenryūji have fabrics woven with this fifth structure. One associated with Kōhō Kennichi, a contemporary of Nyodai, is too fragile to spread out. A large *rakusu* 絡子 (five-panel *kesa* hung around the neck) associated with Wuxue and stored at Engakuji 円覚寺 in Kamakura was also woven with the fifth *kenmonsha* structure. Unfortunately, the only proof that this was actually used by Wuxue, however, is that it was found in a box with other things belonging to him. The existence of these two examples of the fifth *kenmonsha* weave structure, both associated with contemporaries of Nyodai, suggests that at least the *kenmonsha* bands of the yellow *kesa* at Shōkokuji could have been produced in Nyodai's time.

Textile historians often use the style and size of patterns as dating tools. In general, the earlier *kenmonsha* fabrics display larger patterns. The peony design on Wuxue's *rakusu* is cut into small rectangles making it impossible to discern the entire pattern unit, though the peonies appear large.⁵⁹ On the other hand, the peonies on the yellow *kesa* at Shōkokuji, though of similar style, are of medium size (H. 14.0 cm, W. 11.0 cm) (fig. 8.8).⁶⁰ Some scholars have noted that earlier *kenmonsha* peony scrolls tend to have stems rendered with double lines, while later ones often depict them with a single line.⁶¹ Wuxue's *rakusu* combines single line stems and double line ones. The yellow *kesa* at Shōkokuji has double lines (fig. 8.9).

The standard tailoring construction of these Rinzaï Zen nine-panel gauze-weave *kesa* (see fig. 8.7) was to join several large pieces of fabric to form the overall shape and then to stitch the bands of different cloth on top of this backing or "ground" (*ji* 地). The bands covered the perimeter border and ran vertically and horizontally across the central portion to form columns and crossbars,

59 According to *Kamakura Engakuji no Meihō*, p. 54, the diameter of the flower is 9 cm and length of the stem is 16.2 cm, but there is no estimated pattern repeat size.

60 In comparison, the mid-thirteenth-century *kenmonsha* peony scroll pattern on Wuan Punning's *kesa* measures H. 49.6 cm, width 19.6 cm. The *kenmonsha* peony scroll pattern on Abbess Shintsū's mid-fourteenth-century *kesa* from Shun'oku Myōha measures H. 48.2 cm, W. 23.0 cm. But the flower scrolls in the *kenmonsha* fields of Qingzhuo Zhenchon's (Jp. Seisetsu Shōchō 清拙正澄, 1274–1339) *kesa* measure only H. 15.5 cm W. 6.6 cm, and are believed to be a later replacement.

61 Ogasawara, "Kamakura Engakuji no takaramono," pp. 119–120.



FIGURE 8.8 *Detail of the peony pattern with double-line stems, fabric for the bands of the yellow kesa at Shōkokuji*
 SOURCE: AUTHOR PHOTO. USED WITH KIND
 PERMISSION OF SHŌKOKUJI

thus creating borders to rectangular “fields” where the ground fabric remained uncovered. A similar construction was used for other *kesa* passed down from Wuxue.⁶²

The 1651 description of the Shōkokuji yellow *kesa* notes the ground fabric 地 to be “*ji hokken*.” *Hokken* 北絹 refers to a thin plain weave silk woven from wild yellow cocoons. Indeed, the back lining of the *kesa* is a beautiful natural yellow plain weave silk typical of fabrics woven with yellow cocoons (fig. 8.10).⁶³

62 One given to Mushō Jōshō is a good example.

63 Silk worms produce different color thread depending on what type of leaves they eat. In Thailand and Cambodia they still raise silkworms on leaves that produce golden cocoons.

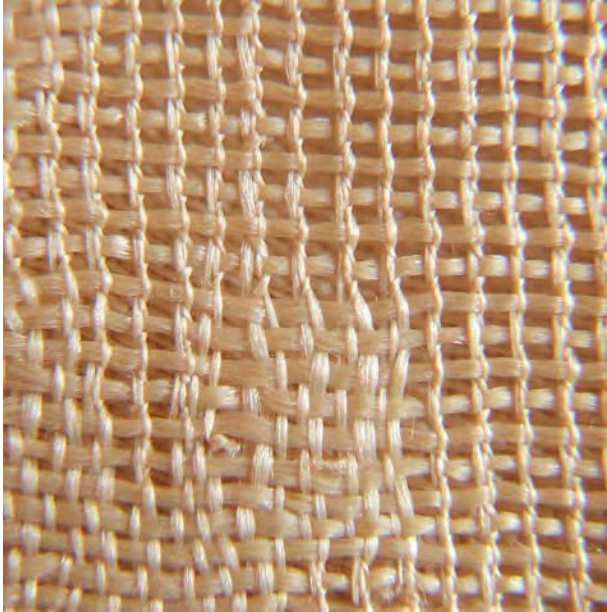


FIGURE 8.9 *Magnification of the weave structure on the yellow kesa at Shōkokuji*

SOURCE: AUTHOR PHOTO. USED WITH KIND PERMISSION OF SHŌKOKUJI

Although the first known mention of *hokken* dates to the fifteenth century, it could have been imported much earlier.⁶⁴

More puzzling, however, is the non-standard tailoring of the *kesa*. Instead of allowing the *hokken* to be seen from the front as “fields,” it serves solely as a lining on the reverse. Rectangles of plain satin fill in the spaces between the bands (fig. 8.11). This construction appears like a hybrid between the Rinzai style nine-panel construction and the standard Ritsu construction of *kesa* (discussed below) where a patchwork of individual rectangles is laboriously sewn to the vertical and horizontal bands.

The plain satin fabric raises more questions. Of the four basic weave structures—plain weave (under one, over one repeat), twill weaves (floats displaced by one warp in each successive row to form diagonal ridges), gauze weaves (crossed warps), and satin weaves (longer floats in irregular repeat forming a glossy surface)—the satin weaves emerge much later than the others, around

64 The mid-fifteenth century dictionary *Mangakushū* 万学集 lists *hokken* 北絹 as being imported from Tokin 東京 (Fujian Province).

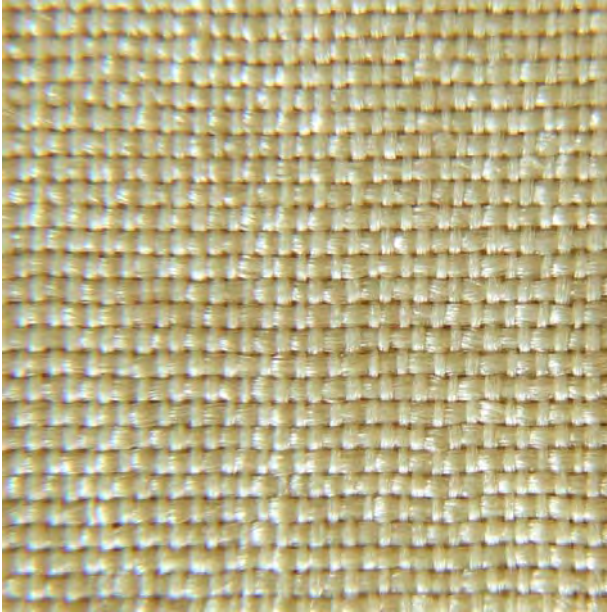


FIGURE 8.10 *Magnification of the plain weave structure of the lining in the yellow kesa at Shōkokuji, showing silk woven with natural yellow cocoons*
SOURCE: AUTHOR PHOTO. USED WITH KIND PERMISSION OF SHŌKOKUJI

the twelfth century. In addition, remaining satin-weave textiles follow an odd chronology. Examples from the Liao (907–1125) and Yuan (1271–1368) dynasties are almost all patterned satin (*donsu* 緞子).⁶⁵ This suggests the more complex technique may have preceded the simpler, though the quirks of historic preservation may be playing tricks here.

Whatever the case, the non-standard construction of the *kesa* combined with three types of fabrics, two of which are usually dated to the fifteenth century or later, suggests several possible interpretations. If the *kesa* was indeed Nyodai's, either what we have now is a replica of the original or the original *kesa* may have been re-sewn using some old and some new materials. Indeed, it may have been re-sewn twice, since the 1651 description makes no mention of the satin fields.

65 A few examples from the eighth century of compound weave using satin ground, sometimes referred to as “satin samite” (e.g. slippers in the Shōsōin) exist, but this is structurally distinct from the patterned and simple satin that appear later.

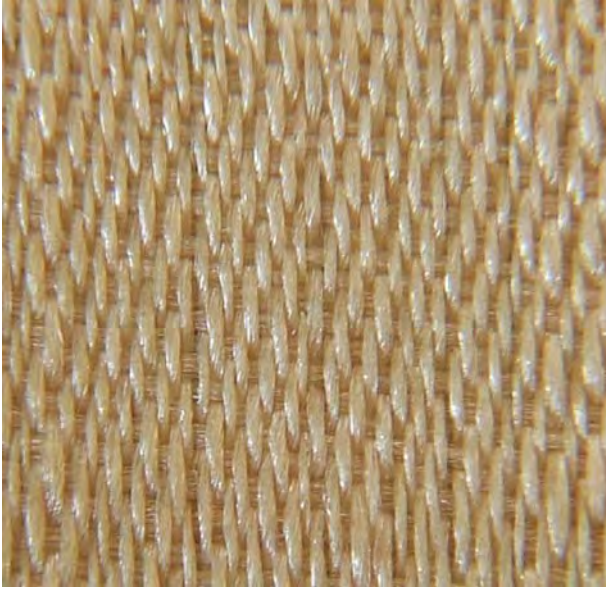


FIGURE 8.11 *Magnification of the satin weave structure of the fabric used for the fields in the yellow kesa at Shōkokuji*

SOURCE: AUTHOR PHOTO. USED WITH KIND PERMISSION OF SHŌKOKUJI

A Contending *Kesa*

North of Nagoya nestled in the mountains of what is now Gifu Prefecture lies the temple of Shōkenji 松見寺. According to the temple history, it is here that Mugai Nyodai reached enlightenment and composed the poem that won her recognition from Wuxue. She was collecting water in the temple well, or stream, and admiring the moon's reflection in her bucket when the bottom fell out: No water, no moon!

No matter how you look at it
 When the bottom of the bucket
 falls away,
 It will not hold water
 Nor will it house the moon⁶⁶

66 Translation by Barbara Ruch, *Amamonzeki*, p. 60.

The homeliness of the activity, simplicity of the wording, and clarity of the message have earned this poem longevity. It is quoted in the *Nanajūichi shokunin utaawase* 七十一職人歌合 (Poetry contest of seventy-one artisans; section featuring Zen versus Risshū nuns, 15th century),⁶⁷ depicted by Hakuin 白隠 (1686–1768), and forms the highlight of the many legends about Chiyo-no—allegedly the childhood name of Mugai Nyodai. The vicissitudes of the “Story of Chiyo-no” (*Chiyo-no Nyodai oshō ki* 千代能如大和尚記) and the parallel “Tale of Mugai” (*Nyodai zenshi shoden* 如大禪師小伝) belongs to another essay. Here I shall limit myself to the Shōkenji temple history and its references to the *kesa*.

In the archives at Shōkenji are several nearly identical versions of its temple history dated to 1677. Beginning with, “In Minō district, the temple of Shōkenji is where Nyodai of the Keiaiji Convent first embarked on the path of Buddhism. Nyōdai’s childhood name was Chiyo-no ...,” these “histories” basically tell the story of Nyodai’s path to enlightenment and, like the various Chiyo-no stories also owned by the temple, combine legend and fact, conflating the identities of Chiyo-no, Mugai, and another name identified with her, Mujaku. The story relates that after experiencing her enlightenment and composing the bucket poem, Nyodai went off to Engakuji in Kamakura and passed various examinations with Bukkō Kokushi/Wuxue. Finally, “in recognition of her enlightenment, she received his robe. The robe embodies the truth of the Law.”

The Shōkenji documents list among their treasures an “Asa 麻 [bast fiber] *hōe*: A robe passed down from Bukkō Kokushi to Honorable Mugai Nyodai on the third day of the ninth month of Kōan 弘安 9 [1286].”⁶⁸ Indeed, they have a dark brown twenty-five panel *kesa* stored in a green lacquer box with a gold chrysanthemum crest on the top (fig. 8.12). Also in the box are two verification slips. One is not dated, but might belong with another slip in the box dated 1809.⁶⁹ The other was written by the late abbess of Hōkyōji, Kasannoin Jikun 花山院慈薰 (1910–2006) in 1947. Both identify the *kesa* as a transmission robe (*denpō kesa* 伝法袈裟) and detail how Nyodai received the *kesa*. The later one also gives a short history of Keiaiji and claims that Abbess Tokugon Rihō of Hōkyōji presented the *kesa* to Shōkenji, though no historical document to corroborate this has yet been found.⁷⁰

67 Harada, “Nyonin to zenshū,” pp. 140–141.

68 Shōkenji inventory, Shōkenji archives. [麻法衣 一衣弘安九年九月三日受納是レハ佛光国師ヨリ如大和尚遺衣ナリ].

69 Bunka 文化 6.

70 For further detail, see Patricia Fister’s chapter in this volume.



FIGURE 8.12 *Dark brown, bast fiber twenty-five panel kesa associated with Mugai Nyodai, Shōkenji*

SOURCE: AUTHOR PHOTO. USED WITH KIND PERMISSION OF SHŌKENJI

Nothing in the fabric or construction of the *kesa* would either corroborate or deny the truth of the verifications. This is a standard *vinaya* (*ritsu* 律) *kesa*, that is, one sewn according to monastic rules, for which in Japan the stipulations were set down by the Chinese priest Jianzhen (Jp. Ganjin 鑑真, 688–763) in the eighth century. The color (brown), the stitching (back stitch), the fiber (*asa*, the poor-folk's staple), the weave structure (plain weave) (fig. 8.13) and the construction (patchwork of rectangles set between bands to form a large rectangle and sewn with open sections in the seams) all follow the rules and could date from any period (fig. 8.14).

A twenty-five panel *kesa*, like a nine-panel *kesa*, counts as a “formal” *kesa* worn for ceremonies and celebrations. Still, if we look at the other Rinzai *kesa* known to have been passed on as transmission *kesa*, they are almost all oversized nine-panel *kesa* with an arc-shaped upper edge made of luxury materials. If this brown *asa kesa* did indeed belong to Mugai Nyodai, it is more likely she sewed it herself as a part of her religious practice.

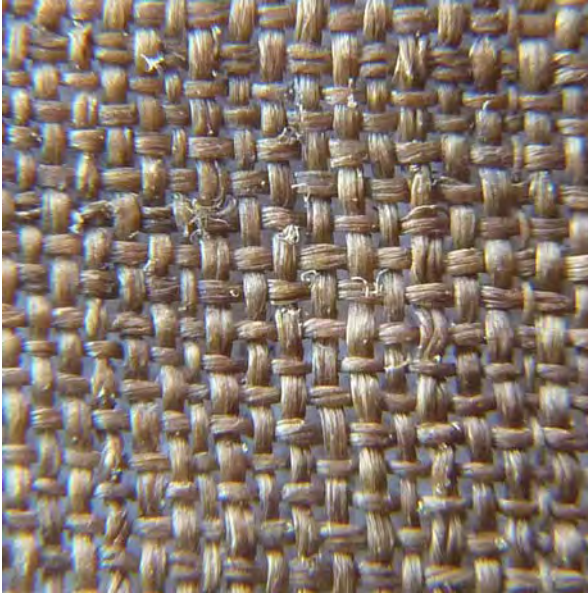


FIGURE 8.13 *Magnification of the plain weave structure of the brown kesa at Shōkenji, showing the straight fibers and twisted ply-joins that identify it as a bast fiber (most likely hemp)*

SOURCE: AUTHOR PHOTO. USED WITH KIND PERMISSION OF SHŌKENJI

Final Thoughts

In tracing the documentation related to the Bukkō Kokushi/ Mugai Nyodai *kesa* and matching it to existing garments a number of general points emerge. First, the symbolic role of the transmission *kesa* changes over time. Second, the economic-socio-political underpinning behind religion in general, and the Five Mountain Zen institutions in particular, plays a complex role that cannot be ignored. Third, the act of verification of an object is an act of appropriation, whether the verification can be defended historically or not.

The self-inscribed portrait and *kesa* that Wuxue presented to Mugai Nyodai symbolized recognition of the depth of her religious experience and authentication of his lineage transmission. His support of her Zen convent, Keiaiji in Kyoto suggests the expectation that the transmission be passed on through future generations. Presumably, Nyodai passed on the paraphernalia to the next abbess of Keiaiji with the same sincerity and sense of lineage succession. Over time, the *kesa* gained a double identity: it was valued as Wuxue's and as Mugai Nyodai's. Put another way, as Wuxue's it belonged to the greater Zen world, as Mugai Nyodai's it symbolized the founder of Keiaiji and her legacy.



FIGURE 8.14 *Detail of the sewing on the brown kesa at Shōkenji, showing the open flaps along the seam that follow ritsu rules*

SOURCE: AUTHOR PHOTO. USED WITH KIND PERMISSION OF SHŌKENJI

As Wuxue's, the *kesa* was important to his male successors, particularly Musō Soseki and his lineage, who were central to the establishment of the Five Mountain Zen temples in Kyoto. Around 1342, Musō moved the graves of Nyodai and the fourth Keiaiji abbess Kohō Keishū to Shōmyakuan.⁷¹ That done, Musō renamed it Shinnyoji, made himself its founder and Wuxue its spiritual founder, with a nodding recognition to his own mentor, Kōhō Kennichi, and to Mugai Nyodai.

In 1354 when the Keiaiji abbess E'nichi wrote that she was passing on the abbacy (and *kesa*) to Karin Egon, she recommended that the nuns turn to Musō's successors for guidance. In the following decades, as the Five Mountain Zen temple system took form, Keiaiji was placed at the head of the parallel Five Mountain Zen convents. This tied it into the Ashikaga shogunate political web. Typically, the abbesses were appointed by the shogun from a list (Yoshimitsu designated four sub-temples from which to choose) and changed frequently. At this point, the *kesa* transmission migrated to the branch temple Kenshōin and

71 Yanbe, "Nyodai enyū no jiin to Muromachi bakufu," pp. 565–566.

the shogun was instrumental in getting the *kesa* returned there when, for some reason, it had wandered back to the main temple of Keiaiji.

Judging from Madenokōji Tokifusa's diary, *Kennaiki*, however, by the mid fifteenth century, the possession of Wuxue's portrait and *kesa* had taken on a new role. His daughter Jishō received the *kesa* when she took the tonsure to become a full-fledged nun and abbess of Kenshōin. A priest at Shōkokuji, not the previous possessor of the *kesa*, conducted the ceremony, and shogunal funds underwrote the expenses. By having his daughters installed in Kenshōin, Tokifusa managed to keep the *kesa* and portrait in his family for three abbacies. At this point the *kesa* had ceased to function as a transmission of profound religious maturity and had instead become a coveted relic with symbolic prestige that was "possessed" by the family.

For whatever reasons, however, the young Jishō proved unable to sustain this privilege and, rather than return it to Keiaiji, in 1455 she deposited the *kesa* in Wuxue's mortuary temple, Shōmyakuan (Shinnyoji). She thereby ended its transmission and laid it to rest as a treasured relic in a male monastery. As such in Shinnyoji, it lent authority to Musō's temple and would serve in rituals, such as memorial ceremonies.

How and whether the transmission *kesa* survived the fires and devastation of the following hundred years is yet to be researched. A *kesa* associated with Nyodai reemerged as a yellow *kesa* stored in Shōkokuji (Chōtokuin) and was lent (or returned) to Shōmyakuan for the 500th anniversary of Mugai Nyodai's death in 1798. By this time Nyodai was well established as one of the spiritual founders of Shinnyoji and a statue of her was in place to mark this. Confusion as to the true identity of the yellow *kesa*, however, blurs the issue. It may have belonged to Musō Soseki.

Verifying the authenticity of a relic gives it weight. Nyodai's yellow *kesa* at Shōkokuji comes with two verification slips and her brown *kesa* at Shōkenji with two others. The former underscore Nyodai's importance, the latter serve to enhance the image of Shōkenji convent and its "mother" convent Hōkyōji by providing a concrete connection to their mutual spiritual founder, Mugai Nyodai. The Shōkenji verifications reinforce relationships between convents and perpetuate the Keiaiji legacy.

As indicated by the inscription on the box for Gakuin Egatsu's *kesa*, when an original *kesa* is copied, the copy still carries an association with the person who wore it. In this way fragile, perishable items like fabrics can be renewed and perpetuated without losing their associative value. Chinsō 頂相 portraits were often reproduced. *Kesa* that were frayed or tattered were re-sewn, salvaging what was possible of the original.

From a textile historian's perspective, there is little question that the yellow *kesa* at Shōkokuji has been remade at least once if not twice, or is a copy of

the original. The fabric most likely to date from the thirteenth century, when Nyodai and Wuxue lived, is the gauze-weave textile used for the bands, but even this poses questions. From a religious perspective, however, the reverence paid to the garment, the legacy it represents, the use made of it for ritual commemorations, and the people it evokes overshadow historical fact. So, too, in establishing a legend for the brown *kesa* at Shōkenji, it gained a function that served to honor two convents and reassert the legacy of Mugai Nyodai.

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