

## Fashioning the Family

### *A Temple, a Daughter, and a Wardrobe*

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How did early modern Japanese families apportion their property? Historians and social scientists do not agree on much about the Japanese “household system” (*ie seido*), and the issue of property is no exception. The sociologist Nakane Chie famously argued that impartible inheritance was a pillar of the stem family system, which envisioned the house as an unbroken line stretching from a distant past into an uncertain future.<sup>1</sup> Thus, to increase the likelihood of survival, a married couple would typically leave an inheritance to one (biological or adopted) son, leaving other children to fend for themselves. Supposedly, the pressure on the household head to preserve his descendants’ patrimony was so intense that he could not claim the family fortune as his own: “Property belonged to the household and not to its head.”<sup>2</sup> In response to Nakane’s claims, the demographic historian Hayami Akira and others argued that impartible inheritance was a “myth.”<sup>3</sup> Their critique was soon followed by scholarship that alternately challenged and defended the traditional interpretation of the Edo period household as patriarchal and patrilineal.<sup>4</sup>

The participants in this debate, which flourished in English-language scholarship during the 1980s and ’90s, tended to rely on village and city block records that documented the inheritance of major assets, such as land and storefronts. But what about property held in other forms—in cloth, paper, and tortoiseshell, carved into hair ornaments and sewn into kimono? These mundane items were unlikely to appear in records submitted to the authorities, and they were not the types of “heirloom treasures” that Pitelka describes in this volume, things valued as symbols of an ancestor’s political or aesthetic achievements. But as objects of both household consumption and production, they were important stores of value.<sup>5</sup> They made the work of the inside of the household—by women who drew up shopping lists and sewed hems and scrubbed out stains—visible in the outside world, where their

proper display transformed labor into the intangible commodity of reputation. Yet even as they performed this service for the household, mundane items posed problems of meaning, boundaries, and ownership, in part because the household's collective claim on them was not a matter of public record. Moreover, while a farm or a storefront could be counted on to stay in place, clothing walked out into the world every day. Did all those kimono, overcoats, hairpins, and sandals belong to the individuals wearing them? Or were they household property?

The question matters because clothing had become an almost universal investment by the early nineteenth century, when even poor families possessed a few sets of clothes, and wealthy commoners could claim substantial and valuable wardrobes. This was a relatively late development. At the beginning of the Edo period, when everyday clothes were made of hemp, robes were durable enough to outlast their owners; it was said that poor mountain villagers spent their entire lives in a single robe. But by the mid-eighteenth century, when cotton textiles were widely available for purchase throughout most of the archipelago, ordinary people collected more garments in this less expensive, more fragile material and replaced them more frequently.<sup>6</sup> As the commercial economy spread to the countryside, wealthier families also acquired the means to purchase silk. Village headmen's wives and daughters even had nightclothes and waistcloths fashioned from luxurious silk crepe. Gifts for newborn babies included bolts of silk along with traditional foodstuffs, and newlyweds gave their parents crepe robes as thank-you gifts after their weddings.<sup>7</sup>

The shogunate, objecting to such excesses on principle, issued repeated edicts exhorting peasants to dress modestly in plain hemp and cotton. But for village elites, both male and female, dressing in the latest urban fashions had become a necessary component of sociability. Well-outfitted headmen, together with their wives and children, possessed several sets of "going-out clothes" to wear on social calls or at village meetings. These ensembles were typically the trendiest items in their wardrobes. According to Tamura Hitoshi's research on the clothing owned by peasants in Musashi Province in the second half of the Tokugawa period, rural elites became highly conscious of styles popular in Edo. If townspeople were wearing short jackets with silk panels, the village headman's son would promptly acquire a similar garment to flaunt at meetings; if finely patterned stripes were in vogue, the headman's daughter would acquire casual kimono of this design for her trousseau. Rural families found ways to incorporate even the expensive textiles popular among upper-class townspeople. When wealthy women in Edo wore entire kimono fashioned from imported chintz, village daughters might accessorize with chintz handkerchiefs.<sup>8</sup> This was a way to display a household's worldliness as well as its wealth. As knowledge of all kinds became valuable social currency in the late Tokugawa period, fashionable dress became an expression of a household's connection to the world outside the village. After all, a family that kept up with the fashion news from Edo was sure to command all kinds of useful information.

But the value of clothing was unstable and difficult to measure. Its social utility depended on context: a garment had to appear on the appropriate person in the right place and at a suitable occasion. A long-sleeved robe that might define a girl and her family as stylish and up-to-date in a northeastern village would not impress anyone in Kyoto. That same robe, moreover, might be valued by different members of the family for different reasons. By the mid-nineteenth century, audiences were familiar with the trope of the villainous husband who pawned his wife's cherished kimono and turned a family heirloom into ready cash. In the most famous example, from the play *Yotsuya Ghost Tale* (*Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan*, 1825), an evil husband rips off his wife's hair comb and kimono so that he can pawn them and finance a marriage to another woman. This violation is the beginning of a process of physical transformation that turns the virtuous wife, Oiwa, into a vengeful, bloodthirsty ghost.<sup>9</sup>

In real-life families, too, where struggles over property came to less spectacular ends, disputes over the ownership of clothing could be proxies for conflict over the very meaning and boundaries of the household. Wardrobes linked the work of the inside of the household to its public face, connected individual self-fashioning to family reputation, and followed members of the family through the various social and geographical contexts in which the household was embedded. They were also easily liquidated and frequently accepted as surety for loans. Changing hands and shifting shape, wardrobes slipped back and forth over the border between individual possession and household property, inside and outside, consumption and production, use and exchange. They were caught up in the messiness of everyday life, where presumptive rules about household formation, membership, succession, and conduct were continually tested—where, in the end, “the family” often revealed itself as a set of incoherent and contradictory ideas. Here I follow one such messy situation, in which members of a dysfunctional family assembled, disassembled, and fought over one woman's wardrobe.

#### ASSEMBLING THE WARDROBE

In the summer of 1833, the family residing at Rinsenji temple in Ishigami village in Echigo Province was large, fractious, and complicated. The head priest, Giyū, who was also the head of household, had occupied his position for a decade. By 1833, he had already married and divorced once.<sup>10</sup> At thirty-four, he had one child, a boy named Kihaku; in time, he would have five.<sup>11</sup> They lived with his mother, who was affectionately known as Rinsenji-no-haha (Mama Rinsenji), and his retired father. A few of Giyū's siblings were still at home. His oldest sister, Kiyomi, had married into a nearby temple several years earlier, and although she had a difficult marriage, it was surprisingly durable.<sup>12</sup> Two of his younger brothers, Girin and Giryū, had been exiled after several instances of misconduct, including theft from the family, adultery, and sexual assault.<sup>13</sup> But the youngest brother, Gisen, still lived at

the temple, and so did three younger sisters: a little girl named Ino, sixteen-year-old Toshino, and twenty-nine-year-old Tsuneno, who had already been divorced and returned home once.<sup>14</sup> Both Tsuneno and Toshino were preparing to be married in the coming months, perhaps to lessen the burden on their older brother.

Over the course of the hectic summer of 1833, Giyū drew up several documents as he tried to figure out what his sisters would need for their trousseaus. Some were shopping lists, complete with dates of purchases and prices paid; others were records of engagement gifts that had arrived in the form of cloth and clothing; still others appear to be brainstorming on paper, including hastily scrawled notes and price estimates that would eventually turn out to be wrong. In time, a few of these lists would be bound into booklets containing other information about the weddings, including guests invited and dishes served. The rest were folded accordion style and packed away. Nine records pertaining to the weddings, some consuming several long sheets of paper, survive in the Rinsenji document collection, now held in the Niigata Prefectural Archives.

As Giyū concerned himself with record keeping, the women of the household were hard at work behind the scenes. According to the inventories (all of them products of Giyū's brush or that of his secretary, Denpachi), many of the items purchased, such as individual cuffs and hem linings, had to be sewn into robes at home. This required substantial skill, which could be lucrative in other circumstances. Years later, when Tsuneno was leading a life very different from the one her parents had planned, she monetized the skills she had practiced on her own trousseau. From a rented room in Edo, she wrote home requesting that her mother send her a ruler and some scraps of cloth: "Most of what I do recently is sewing. . . . I'm making a striped crepe robe for my master."<sup>15</sup>

Because they sewed, women must have decided how to apportion the household budget between raw materials and finished pieces. They must also have solved the fashion quandaries that appear occasionally in the annotations to the inventories. One document, a list of things to be ordered, poses a question: "Should this unlined kimono be striped silk crepe or should it have a fine pattern?" It is followed by an answer: "The fine pattern is better."<sup>16</sup> Other lists include definitive judgments on issues no priest could be expected to know anything about, such as how many cotton collars would be sufficient for a young lady's wardrobe. (Apparently, two were not enough.)<sup>17</sup> As Yabuta Yutaka argues, this division of labor—between the men who recorded the details of domestic affairs and the (often highly literate) women who conducted them—was typical of properly functioning households.<sup>18</sup> The 1833 inventories reflect the collaborative domestic labor of people who agreed on the meaning and value of the items they were listing.

Of the two weddings, both in 1833, Tsuneno's seems to have occupied more of the family's attention. Before her marriage, to a wealthy peasant in the nearby village of Ōshima, Giyū drew up a list of the clothing she already possessed. It catalogs fifty-seven items, including five lined silk kimono; fifteen cotton-padded

robes in pongee, silk crepe, and striped and patterned cotton; six obi sashes, some of expensive satin and damask; five unlined cotton robes for summer; various pieces of silk crepe underwear; and several kinds of outerwear (a rain jacket, a stylish sleeveless jacket, and two wrappers). Although nothing in this wardrobe was made of imported cloth, the list does mention styles that originated on the Asian continent and places of manufacture that spanned the Japanese archipelago.<sup>19</sup> Twenty-nine-year-old Tsuneno had “São Tome,” “Nanking,” and “Ôme” stripes; a “Tamagawa-dyed” silk crepe inner robe; a kimono lined in “Chichibu” (silk); and a “Mooka” cotton informal summer robe. Well before the family bought anything new for her trousseau, Tsuneno’s clothing signaled her household’s connections to a national, even global, economy, one in which girls across Eurasia wore the names of places they never expected to see.<sup>20</sup>

Although this was already a formidable collection, her mother and her older brother judged it insufficient. After collaborating on a draft list of things to be ordered,<sup>21</sup> they went shopping in the weeks before the wedding. They bought (or in one case, had remade) an additional fifty-three items, most of them purchased from a clothier in Takada. They bought raw materials (bolts of white cotton, raw cotton, glossy silk, and ramie); commercially fabricated cuffs, collars, and hems; accessories such as shoes, hairpins, and handkerchiefs; and a complete set of white clothing, possibly for the wedding ceremony. There was one major splurge: a formal kimono in black basket-weave silk with an obi. And since Tsuneno would need to store all these things, they also bought boxes for needles and hairpins, a chest, and a standing wardrobe.<sup>22</sup> By the time the shopping was finished, Tsuneno had accumulated over a hundred pieces for her trousseau. However impressive, the collection was by no means out of the ordinary for a young woman of her status. It resembled, for example, one assembled for the daughter of a village headman in Musashi Province nine years later. Tsuneno had many more padded robes (she lived in snow country, after all) and fewer trendy items such as short winter jackets and chintz handkerchiefs (perhaps because such styles had not penetrated Echigo as early as 1833). But both girls possessed the luxurious items that distinguished truly well-off village women from their social-climbing peers: satin obi sashes and silk underclothes.<sup>23</sup>

A collection of this caliber was extremely expensive. Giyū estimated that 14 *ryō* and 3 *bu* would be required to round out her wardrobe.<sup>24</sup> This turned out not to be enough. A bill from their favorite Takada clothier for one day of shopping alone came to over 12 *ryō*, which Rinsenji paid out in installments over the following two weeks.<sup>25</sup> The household certainly had access to multiple streams of income, including donations from parishioners and rent from temple lands, but outfitting two brides in three months strained its finances.<sup>26</sup> For Tsuneno, the second to be married, Rinsenji found it necessary to accept a gift from the prospective groom’s family: they contributed 15 *ryō* in “preparation money” so that their new daughter-in-law could be properly outfitted.<sup>27</sup>

This gift, a substantial sum for even a prosperous rural family, was crucial because a trousseau conveyed social meanings that hard cash could not. If Tsuneno simply needed ordinary garments from time to time, her in-laws could have bought them as the occasion arose, making the initial gift unnecessary. But what Tsuneno really needed was a complete and prestigious wardrobe to bring into the marriage and, ideally, to display at the wedding.<sup>28</sup> A fully realized trousseau signified that her own household had invested in her future, and thus neither side of the newly created family had an interest in advertising the fact that the money for it had actually come from the groom's father.<sup>29</sup> The trousseau sent the message that Tsuneno's marriage was a union of two estimable households, roughly equal in status, that would endure throughout the seasons and ritual cycles requiring this elegant set of garments.

But even the most thoughtfully assembled trousseau could not ensure a happy marriage. Four years after an auspicious start, Tsuneno was abruptly divorced and sent home.<sup>30</sup> Her brother, Giyū, was concerned for Tsuneno's future, as this was her second divorce. He was also nervous that he might have to return the 15 *ryō* that the in-laws had contributed to her wardrobe. Ordinarily, a trousseau would be returned together with the divorced woman.<sup>31</sup> But the gift complicated matters, and Rinsenji was short of cash: Tsuneno's marriage had coincided with the Tenpō famine, which had made it difficult to collect rents, and the temple was having trouble paying some of its debts.<sup>32</sup> Even worse, Tsuneno's brothers Girin and Gisen had also divorced, and they were living at the temple. Giyū was at a loss. "This year Tsuneno, Girin, and Gisen all divorced," he complained. "The temple is struggling, and we will have to help our poor tenants make it through the winter."<sup>33</sup>

Happily, Tsuneno's former father-in-law assured her family that his initial gift did not need to be returned.<sup>34</sup> This was a magnanimous gesture, but it was also pragmatic. Outfitting a prospective daughter-in-law had been the price of arranging a socially appropriate marriage for their son. Once the marriage had failed, it was difficult to recover an investment that was now held in the form of kimono and accessories associated with a rejected bride. This was the problem with converting household assets into cotton and silk: the social value of stylish clothes could be realized only if the appropriate person wore them. Had Tsuneno's former in-laws demanded a return of the clothes, they could not have sold them without revealing their contribution to the original purchase. And if the same clothes appeared on display at the family's next wedding, the message would be contrary to what the family originally intended. It would signal that the household had brought in an unsophisticated woman who could not afford her own wardrobe.

Meanwhile, at Rinsenji, any questions about who paid for the clothes were concealed amid the cotton prints and glossy silk linings packed away in Tsuneno's chest. If they had once represented a joint investment between Rinsenji and her ex-husband's family, following the divorce they were effectively hers. So, when Tsuneno married for the third time in 1837, to a man living in the castle town

of Takada, there was no need to itemize her belongings or buy new things. She already possessed a wardrobe befitting a prosperous wife, no matter who had provided the start-up funds.

Unfortunately, Tsuneno once again found that a fine trousseau could not guarantee a successful marriage. She was divorced for the third time after only a few months with her new husband. The reasons are not made clear in the documentary record. Perhaps Giyū did not wish to record them for posterity, or maybe he did not think they merited attention. Tsuneno's wardrobe was another matter. A marriage could end quietly, but the fate of the furniture and accessories was carefully documented. When Tsuneno returned to Rinsenji, he wrote, her furniture and possessions came with her.<sup>35</sup>

#### DISASSEMBLING THE WARDROBE

In 1839, a year and a half after her third divorce, Tsuneno ran away to Edo. According to a letter she wrote to her uncle (which was probably partly fabricated, as she changed the story later), she had been on her way to a hot spring resort to receive treatment for an eye disease when she met up with a group of thirteen young people heading for the capital. Among them was a male friend who invited her to join them. Tsuneno, who had been looking for an opportunity to see Edo, gratefully accepted. But she did not have cash on hand, so the friend had an associate take her things to a pawnshop in Takada, where he exchanged the clothes she was carrying for travel funds. The letter lists the pawned items as padded robes in striped silk crepe and cotton, lined underrobes in scarlet crepe and brown patchwork, a patchwork undergarment, a long winter coat in patchwork, a glossy silk unlined robe, a set of patterned handkerchiefs, a mirror, and a box of hairpins.<sup>36</sup> Apart from the hairpins, the mirror, and possibly the unlined robe, none of these items had previously appeared in a Rinsenji inventory. The clothing was casual but new, or at least remade. That is, it was precisely what a young woman would take with her if she intended to leave home and start over again in a more stylish place.<sup>37</sup>

Tsuneno had always thought of her clothes as valuable, not only because they could be worn and displayed to her advantage but also because she had put so much work into creating them. In 1829, during her first marriage, she quarreled with Giyū when he had tried to buy a robe she had made from her brother. It was my work, she insisted, and my skill; I'll decide what to do with it.<sup>38</sup> But when she decided to run away, her wardrobe took on a different meaning: the social messages and personal memories attached to her garments became less important. It did not matter that she had hoped these clothes, worn in the right way, would make a certain impression. What mattered was how much they were worth in cash.

Tsuneno did not admit it in her letter, but even before she arrived in Takada, she had already sold several items of clothing to a man in Iimuro village and deposited the proceeds, 3 *ryō*, with her uncle.<sup>39</sup> She had probably intended to use the money

to finance her travels, but she had decided to leave suddenly and unexpectedly on a day when she did not have any cash with her. It was unfortunate that she had to pawn the clothes she had meant to wear in Edo, but she had already come to terms with her new economic circumstances. If she did not want to depend on her family for spending money, she would have to rely on the only source of credit she had at her disposal: her clothes.

This might have been a new idea for Tsuneno, but it was common knowledge to most of her neighbors. By the second half of the eighteenth century, a network of pawnshops had expanded from big cities to post stations and market towns, and to the villages of rural Echigo. Not far from Rinsenji, the writer Suzuki Bokushi managed a pawnshop that his grandmother had started by lending out her pocket money to peasants who needed cash.<sup>40</sup> Throughout Japan, poor families pawned their summer clothes to raise cash to get through the winter. Tamura cites the example of a Shinto priest's household in Musashi Province that fell on hard times in the early 1850s and pawned its striped cotton and tie-dyed robes when they were out of season.<sup>41</sup>

From her letters, it is clear that Tsuneno understood the logic of pawning: interest on her loan of 3 *ryō* would add up over time, making redemption of her clothes more and more expensive. But she thought she could get around this problem, because she had left her travel money with her uncle for safekeeping. She wrote him twice, once from Takada and, a few days later, from the road, asking him to redeem the items as soon as possible.<sup>42</sup> In case he refused to comply, she also asked her family at Rinsenji for help. Two days after she arrived in Edo, she instructed her brothers to pawn her standing wardrobe closet and her chest (two of the three most valuable things purchased for her trousseau), to add the income to the money she had left with her uncle, and to send her the redeemed clothes. She went on to request the futon and quilt she had left in her bamboo chest, as well as a cotton-padded robe, which she had left hanging. There were two aprons, mirrors, a pillow, and shoulder padding in her long chest. Giyū should send those, too. As for the rest of her things, he should take good care of them for her, and she would send word when she needed them. She wrote in a postscript that she intended to go into service for a daimyo. If she found a place, she would need her entire wardrobe sent as soon as possible.<sup>43</sup>

Giyū had no intention of redeeming Tsuneno's pawned clothes or sending anything else. The problem, in part, was that he disapproved of her running away in the first place. He wrote to Tsuneno: "You lied and told me that you were going to Takada to seek treatment for your eyes and, instead, went to Edo—extremely wicked behavior. . . . You have written requesting that we redeem the items you pawned, but we cannot do that."<sup>44</sup> There was more to the story, however. Giyū's relatives in Edo had already warned the family in Echigo not to send Tsuneno her clothes. After her traveling companion deserted her, Tsuneno had appealed to her aunt and uncle in Edo for help. As they explained to Giyū, they dutifully checked into the young man's

background and found all his relatives to be “suspicious people.” They warned Giyū to be on the lookout for a letter posted from Kanda asking him to redeem the clothes and forward them to Tsuneno’s new address. Such a request, they wrote, would be part of her traveling companion’s plot to steal from the family.<sup>45</sup>

Still, Tsuneno did need clothes to be presentable in Edo. Because she could not be sent home before the weather cleared and an appropriate escort was found, she had to find work—something impossible when, as her uncle put it, she was “completely naked, with no clothes.”<sup>46</sup> This was an exaggeration, surely, but, since Tsuneno had only her traveling clothes to her name, it was close to the truth. For people who knew Tsuneno’s family, her appearance was embarrassing; for those who did not, it was disqualifying. A family friend in Edo brought her to a local employment office, which found her work in a bannerman’s household, but clothing was still a problem.<sup>47</sup> When this friend wrote announcing the news of her placement, he requested two or three sets of clothing on her behalf.<sup>48</sup>

Denpachi, the family’s secretary, replied.<sup>49</sup> According to a draft scrawled on the back of some loose pages of an illustrated book, Giyū could not send clothes, because the household’s relatives, furious that Tsuneno had run off to Edo with a complete stranger, had determined to cut her off. To Tsuneno, such a response was beside the point: she viewed the clothes as hers and often pointedly referred to the places where she had left things (in her luggage, a standing wardrobe, a friend’s house) as if to emphasize that they had been, and should remain, under her control. In the head priest’s view, however, the clothes belonged to the temple and constituted a form of economic support. As long as Tsuneno was officially cut off, Denpachi explained, the head priest could not send them.

But luckily for Tsuneno, her older brother Giyū did not actually manage the household’s wardrobe. Her mother did. This created a useful loophole for everyone involved. Denpachi, feeling sorry for Tsuneno, persuaded Rinsenji-no-haha to give him two cotton-padded robes “for the cold.” Old and not likely to be missed, they match the description of two kimono in the inventory compiled before the shopping trips for her first wedding. Perhaps the head priest was more involved in this deal than he appeared; he recorded the transaction in an inventory compiled a few months later, indicating, in any event, that he was not unaware of it for long.<sup>50</sup> Even so, by exploiting the gendered division of labor in the household, he maintained the fiction that the temple was not supporting Tsuneno. To save face with the extended family, Giyū could not send Tsuneno cash. But his mother could send clothing as long as it was portrayed as an expression of affection and concern for her daughter’s well-being. Tsuneno caught on to the distinction immediately. A few months later, after she had left the bannerman’s service, she addressed her requests directly to Rinsenji-no-haha. She complained of the cold and asked for two sashes, underrobes, hairpins, and cotton and pongee lined and padded robes. At the same time, she asked for and offered token gifts never mentioned in letters to her brothers. For example, she requested miso pickles and offered hair oil and

a large silver coin as a souvenir.<sup>51</sup> According to Rinsenji's records, her mother responded immediately, sending every item of clothing on the list plus bedding.<sup>52</sup>

While Rinsenji-no-haha's gifts were billed as manifestations of care, they were certainly intended to assert the household's control. Denpachi forwarded the first batch of clothing not to Tsuneno herself but to a family friend charged with delivering them and, then, reporting back to Rinsenji about Tsuneno's behavior. The friend was also asked to make sure Tsuneno conducted herself appropriately.<sup>53</sup> As was the case when he assembled her trousseau, the head of household was still trying to use clothing to shape Tsuneno in the image of a well-bred daughter. But now he was employing a new, more nakedly transactional strategy.

For her part, a more temperate Tsuneno confined her requests to cotton and pongee, relatively inexpensive materials. In some ways, she was refashioning her identity, discarding the extensive collection of a provincial bride for the striped cotton uniform of workingwomen in Edo (and across the globe).<sup>54</sup> But cotton was also less valuable than silk, damask, or satin, which made it easier to request from a family that was already suspicious that she intended to sell clothes for cash. It was to Tsuneno's benefit to emphasize her intention to use the clothing, not exchange it. In a letter to her older brother Kōtoku, she wrote, "I don't need my good clothes. But please, please, I'm asking you to send my heavy coat and two bad cotton padded robes to keep out the cold."<sup>55</sup> In another letter, sent from a different place of employment, she described her embarrassment over encountering the lady of the house in the ragged robe she was wearing.<sup>56</sup> She appealed to the household, in effect, to maintain her wardrobe as a sign of affectionate concern over the winter chill and a precondition of sociable presentability. This was the same logic that had applied when she was a daughter and a bride in Echigo.

But Edo was different from Echigo in ways that Giyū, a country priest, could not be expected to understand. In the big city, it was difficult to resist the temptation to exchange clothing for cash. A few months after she received a package of robes, hairpins, and bedding from her mother, Tsuneno was forced to admit to Denpachi that she had sold much of her wardrobe. Her tone was defensive: "I did receive a letter in which you told me not to sell anything, but I had not heard from you at all for a long time. . . . I never wanted to sell even one old robe, but for goodness sake I didn't even have one *mon* and I was helpless!"<sup>57</sup> Tsuneno was "helpless" without money because, unlike her relatives in Echigo, she survived by constantly deploying small amounts of cash. She had become a resident of Edo's backstreet tenements, where people moved often, lacked space for storage, and could not afford to plan ahead. They purchased most things they needed from street vendors, including small scoops of charcoal and individual portions of rice. For this reason, they were chronically in need of spending money, but as people without stable reputations and dependable incomes, they found it difficult to access credit. As Tsuneno found, clothes were an important—perhaps the only—form of security in such circumstances.

But pawning clothes always posed a trade-off between survival and respectability.<sup>58</sup> The very absence of reputation that made it difficult for Edo's poor to access credit put all the more pressure on appearances that signified trustworthiness, honesty, and diligence. Precarious people faced a constant conflict between the need for cash and the need to look employable enough to earn it. As Tsuneno pointed out soon after she arrived, "There are many places to go into service here, but without clothes I can't serve."<sup>59</sup> Over a century before Tsuneno's time, Ihara Saikaku, with typical exaggeration, observed:

Even if no one offers a girl a job and she becomes like a masterless samurai, she clings to her one fashionably printed kimono, her wide silk sash, her one pair of split-toed socks, and her silk floss veil and ornamental comb, for these things are as important to her as the long and short swords are to a samurai: she would rather go without food for three days and drop dead than part with a single one of these items.<sup>60</sup>

Edo pawnshops nevertheless overflowed with silk crepe and cotton prints (as well as, famously, arms and armor). During the Tenpō economic crisis in 1841–42, informants to the city magistrates' offices noted that this oversupply precluded getting good prices for clothes. In fact, pawnshops were overstocked enough to drive most used-clothing shops out of business.<sup>61</sup> In Echigo, it may still have been possible to build a large wardrobe and a good reputation in the same way: slowly, piece by piece, in installments and on credit, by trading on a stable identity and a history in one place. But in the backstreets of Edo, identities were fungible and clothing was hard to hold onto. Contrary to Saikaku's remarks about starving but well-dressed maidservants, Tsuneno, like many of her peers, was willing to sacrifice respectability for the immediate reassurance of cash; she knew the former could be reestablished with a new set of clothes. Peter Stallybrass's observation of midcentury London is equally true of an Edo awash in reluctantly surrendered kimono: "Respectability, that central nineteenth-century virtue, was something to be bought and, in times of need, pawned."<sup>62</sup>

However, from Giyū's perspective, when Tsuneno pawned her clothes, she was exchanging the entire household's reputation for cash. This was a deal that the temple's head of household was not willing to make. Unlike an individual, an established household could not refashion its identity as easily as changing clothes; Rinsenji had built up social networks in Edo over generations, and it could not retreat into anonymity.<sup>63</sup> When Tsuneno appeared at the city's Shin temples dressed in rags, she communicated two messages: first, that Rinsenji's daughter had rejected the life her family had arranged for her; second, that the household refused to take care of its own. According to Tsuneno's brother Gisen, who was also in Edo, Tsuneno knew this and took advantage of the situation. She even complained to outsiders that the household did not adequately support her. "I asked Tokuhonji [another Shin temple] to secretly lend her a futon," he wrote, "so now she will not be able to say that 'back home' never does anything for her."<sup>64</sup>

The role of clothing as a display of familial affection (or at least a simulacrum of that affection) turned out to be more important to the household's reputation than the men at Rinsenji had anticipated. Rinsenji-no-haha had maintained Tsuneno figuratively (if not literally) off the books, even when she was behaving badly, making clear that gifts conveyed care rather than a public statement of economic support. After Rinsenji-no-haha died, this loophole closed, and the remaining male family members decided not to waste any more of the household's resources on Tsuneno. This made the temple vulnerable to charges of heartlessness. Writing to the family years later, when a disheveled Tsuneno arrived on his doorstep after divorcing yet another husband, a samurai acquaintance observed that Tsuneno had one tattered robe to her name. He was shocked that her younger brother in Edo, Gisen, seemed unmoved by her state and noted disapprovingly that the two "barely had a sibling relationship at all."<sup>65</sup> Rinsenji was then forced to call Tsuneno home before she could cause any more embarrassment; she, again unable to get work because she had no clothes, was forced to comply.

#### CONCLUSION

Translated and converted into typeface, Rinsenji's inventories of Tsuneno's clothing look repetitive: "Item: a silk crepe lining. Item: a São Tome striped robe." Yet lurking behind a seemingly compulsive need to list and relist similar items over and over again are signs of accelerating conflict and even disintegration. Rinsenji's handwriting is replaced by Tsuneno's, then Denpachi's, then Rinsenji-no-haha's, then Gisen's, as the labor of managing the wardrobe is transformed from a cooperative endeavor on behalf of the household to a site of conflict among its members.

Giyū's distress at what he called "extremely wicked behavior" arose from the way Tsuneno had subverted his authority as the family's patriarch. She asserted control over her body by running off with a strange man and then supported herself in a strange city using the tools and resources her family had provided: clothing, literacy, and the ability to perform domestic work. It was fitting that she had initiated her rebellion at a pawnshop, a place where the mundane stuff of domestic life—the products of women's judgment, expertise, and labor—could be transformed into cash and credit. The exchange made clear that housework was not inevitably tied to the domestic realm and performed on behalf of the family. It could be monetized, taken into an impersonal outside world, and used as an assertion of independence or a weapon of familial destruction. A cotton robe intended as a display of household wealth and knowledge could be used to finance an elopement. A hairpin purchased to display at a wedding could be turned into rent for a seedy tenement. And parents who carefully supervised their daughter's education might find that their investment yielded unexpected returns.

Even when clothing was not exchanged for cash, its display exposed the contradictions inherent in the idea of an “inside” world of female domestic labor.<sup>66</sup> First, unlike the management of cash, which could be conducted largely out of sight, the management of clothing was always subject to scrutiny. No one knew how much cash a household could access; everyone in the community, whether a village or an Edo neighborhood, saw what clothing it could afford. Through their work producing, consuming, and repairing clothing, women made the invisible labor of accumulating wealth, typically seen as men’s work, intelligible to the outside world.

The same distinction between a feminine “inside” and a masculine “outside” collapses when clothing is considered as an expression of affection. Among the women of Rinsenji, clothes tended to be treated as form of currency in an emotional economy that depended on the exchange of notes, pickles, and hair oil. This projection of intimate attachment was useful when the temple needed to send Tsuneno clothes after officially cutting her off; the transfer from mother to daughter could pass unrecognized by a household head obliged to save face with other relatives. When necessary, the expression of womanly affection could be disregarded in the “outside” world of men, even when it was plain to see. On the other hand, a perceived lack of emotional connection, symbolized by the sorry state of Tsuneno’s wardrobe after her mother’s death, could not be ignored. It was perceived by outsiders as a failure of intimacy and a sign that the family did not function properly. Clothing either rendered the realm of affect visible or signaled its distressing absence.

If the display of clothing blurred the distinctions between a household’s “inside” and “outside,” it also mediated the household’s relationships to the various communities within which it was embedded. The same striped cotton robe, worn in Echigo or Edo, had different messages; it either distinguished the household by communicating familiarity with city styles or enabled the individual to pass through the urban labor market without attracting attention. In the provinces, a proper wardrobe cemented the household’s reputation, developed over time in a comparatively stable community. In the city, it communicated respectability, a virtue rendered necessary by transience and anonymity. As Tsuneno (and her clothes) moved from the countryside to the capital, these functions became intertwined: a well-dressed Tsuneno in Edo was respectable, and she did comparatively little damage to her family’s reputation. But a “completely naked” Tsuneno was different: she was only temporarily disrespectful, but she caused lasting damage to her family’s reputation. As stories of her appearance in Edo filtered back home, Giyū found that his assertions of authority over his sister, so convincing on paper, could not compete with the messages conveyed by her inadequately clothed body on the street. For her family’s correspondents, her tattered robes invited speculation that her household itself had unraveled.

Both reputation and wardrobe were carefully assembled products of collaborative efforts between men and women working within domestic spaces across

generations. But in an era when even provincial brides might own a dozen silk kimono and men from temple families in snow country might study in Edo, names and robes had little utility if they were held too closely. They were meant to be carried into the outside world, where they would be worn proudly and used to enhance the reputation of the household's members. But once there, they could be discarded or exchanged in the service of some personal agenda. No matter how carefully they were monitored, neither reputations nor wardrobes could be managed by the head of household alone. Nor could they be disentangled. Giyū feverishly attended to Tsuneno's clothing, but her clothing and the image it communicated about the family eluded his control.

For this reason, mundane possessions can tell stories about the "household system" that are very different from those conveyed by more substantial assets, such as land and shop fronts. Because small items moved along with people, because they followed tortured trajectories without being passed down in an orderly fashion, they show us how households stretched across space in addition to marching forward in time. They also reveal how social and spatial context mattered to the constitution of the family and to the norms that governed its members. In Echigo, where Rinsenji was a coherent and hierarchically organized institution, Tsuneno was the prodigal daughter who needed to be chastised; her younger brother Gisen was the dutiful son who tried to bring her under control. But in Edo, as at least one of Rinsenji's correspondents made clear, Gisen was the offender who shirked his responsibilities by turning his back on his sister; Tsuneno was the victim who struggled with an inadequate wardrobe because her family would not take care of her. To "Tsuneno in Edo" (as she signed some of her letters, incorporating her place of residence into her identity), the equation was slightly different. Gisen was, indeed, a delinquent brother. "He treats me like a stranger," she complained.<sup>67</sup> And her family in Echigo was at fault, too, not only because they showed a lack of affection but also because they refused to give her what she was owed as a daughter of the temple. In declining to send her clothes, they withheld property she claimed as her own.

The struggle over Tsuneno's clothes was a proxy for a more complicated conflict. In Edo as well as Echigo, the "early modern family" existed in the minds of its members and the opinions of neighbors, relations, and even casual acquaintances. But they did not necessarily agree on who should be included in the family or what its members owed to one another. Some were invested in a family that responsibly stewarded property, others in a family that manifested care. Some thought of the family as an orderly march through generations; others as a tangle of siblings, uncles, and in-laws. And depending on the situation and their physical location, their definitions could change.

In that sense, the wardrobe, with its shifting shapes and adaptations to individual needs, may be a more useful metaphor for the early modern family than the metonym *house*, with its connotations of stability, unity, and permanence. The

family was both carefully and casually assembled. It adapted to changing seasons and landscapes and fashions. It moved through space. How it should be constituted and who controlled it remained unsolved problems. The family balanced, precariously, on the boundary between individual and collective claims. And sometimes, shaken by conflict, it scattered.

## NOTES

1. For an English-language summary of this argument, see Nakane 1990, 216–22.
2. Nakane 1990, 221.
3. Hayami 1983, 3–29.
4. An insightful overview of the literature on female household heads (and whether there were more or fewer than one might expect) appears in Anderson 2010, 23–27. See also Uno 1996, 569–94.
5. On traditional Japanese clothing as an item of household consumption and production, see Gordon 2011; and Francks 2012, 151–75.
6. Asaoka 2005, 46–50. Peasants in Kinai and Kantō were already wearing cotton in the early Tokugawa period. Wealthier peasants bought cotton cloth for new clothes, but others wore homespun or bought old clothes from cities. Cotton clothing did not become common among peasants in non-cotton-producing areas until the middle of the period, as the used clothing business expanded from Osaka. Nagahara 2008, 498–500, 517.
7. Tamura 2004, 229, 254–56.
8. Tamura 2004, 224, 229. Indian chintz was imported by the Dutch East India Company through Nagasaki until the 1830s, and it was considered higher quality than domestically produced chintzes, which started out as copies of foreign products. Fujita 2009, 194–201.
9. Tsuruya Nanboku 2013, 168–82. See also the analysis of this play in Shimazaki 2016.
10. “Giyū tsugime”; “Nairan ichijō.”
11. “Kihaku tanjō ubuyashinai mimaichō.”
12. Letter, Saisonji to Rinsenji, undated.
13. “Nairan ichijō.”
14. Letter, Rinsenji to Jōganji, [Tenpō 3].1.25. Also, on Tsuneno’s age and her first marriage, see Gotō 2016, 397–98.
15. Letter, Tsuneno to Yamazaki Kyūhachirō, Denpachi, and mother, Tenpō 11.5.22.
16. “Tenpō yon idoshi shigatsu nijū-san nichi Tsuneno-gi Ōshima-mura Koide-shi enzuke sōrō ikken.” Tamura Hitomi’s research suggests that in the Meiji era, grandmothers served as “fashion advisers” for well-bred young ladies who were about to be married. See Tamura 2004, 365.
17. “Tsuneno tadaima made shochi no mono aishirabe sōrō koto.”
18. Yabuta 1995, 225–54. However, in a different context, Yabuta found that the letters in a household collection authored by and addressed to women were generally orders for or requests to borrow kimono. Yabuta 2014, 34.
19. Fujita 2009.
20. On textiles, particularly Indian printed cotton, as global trade goods in the early modern era, see Riello and Parthasarathi 2009.

21. “Tenpō yon idoshi shigatsu nijū-san nichī Tsuneno-gi Ōshima-mura Koide-shi e enzuke sōrō ikken.”
22. “Tenpō yon idoshi shigatsu nijū-san nichī kichijitsu Tsuneno Ōshima Koide nyūka shitakuchō.”
23. See Tamura 2004, 227–29.
24. “Tenpō yon idoshi shigatsu nijū-san nichī Tsuneno-gi Ōshima-mura Koide-shi e enzuke sōrō ikken.”
25. “Tenpō yon idoshi shigatsu nijū-san nichī kichijitsu Tsuneno Ōshima Koide nyūka shitakuchō.”
26. On Shin temple women and luxury, see Starling 2012, 53–54.
27. “Oboe,” Tenpō 4.4.3.
28. Lindsey 2007, 80–81.
29. The trousseau’s symbolic value required creative accounting in other arenas as well. For example, in later letters home, Tsuneno referred to aprons. These, along with other plain work clothes, were absent from the temple’s inventory of her things, which focused on items that conferred status on the household.
30. Letter, Koide Yasōemon to Rinsenji, Tenpō 8.5.27.
31. Fuess 2001, 82–90.
32. The previous year, Giyū had written a letter to a temple in Musashi Province explaining that he could not pay back a 10 *ryō* loan. Letter, Rinsenji to Shōryūji, Tenpō 7.8.8.
33. Untitled, [record of father’s funeral], Tenpō 8.8.
34. “Tenpō yon idoshi shigatsu nijū-san nichī kichijitsu Tsuneno Koide yomeiri shoshikidome.”
35. “Tsuneno Inada-machi Katō-shi e engumi manki.”
36. Letter, Tsuneno to Yamazaki Kyūhachirō, Tenpō 10.9.23.
37. And, in fact, her later letters suggest that Edo had been her intended destination all along. See, for example, letter, Tsuneno to Kōtoku, undated.
38. “Nairan ichijō.”
39. “Tsuneno kanjō torishirabe”; letter, Kin to older brothers, [Tenpō 11].10.25.
40. Moriyama 2013, 74–79.
41. Tamura 2004, 312–13.
42. Letter, Tsuneno to Kyūhachirō, Tenpō 10.9.26.
43. Letter, Tsuneno to Rinsenji, Tenpō 10.10.10.
44. Letter, Rinsenji to Tsuneno, Tenpō 10.11.9.
45. Letter, Moritaya Bunshichi to Rinsenji, Tenpō 10.11.22. Bunshichi and his wife, Mitsū, are referred to in subsequent documents as Tsuneno’s aunt and uncle, but it is not clear whether they were maternal or paternal relatives. In fact, Tsuneno later disavowed all the letters she wrote in her first week in Edo and insisted they were her traveling companion’s idea. Letter, Tsuneno to Denpachi, Kyūhachirō, and mother, Tenpō 11.5.21.
46. Letter, Moritaya Bunshichi to Rinsenji, Tenpō 10.11.22.
47. Tsuneno mentions the employment office in a later letter, to Kōtoku, undated.
48. Letter, Yasugorō to Rinsenji, Tenpō 10.11.22.
49. Letter, Isogai Denpachi to Isogai Yasugorō and Tsuneno, Tenpō 10.12.11.
50. “Rinsenji-no-haha Tsuneno no kirui shimatsu kata hikae.”
51. Letter, Tsuneno to mother, [Tenpō 11].2.23.

52. “Oboe,” Tenpō 11.10.14.
53. Letter, Isogai Denpachi to Isogai Yasugorō and Tsuneno, Tenpō 10.12.11.
54. Ikegami 2005, 283.
55. Letter, Tsuneno to Kōtoku, undated. It was generally considered ridiculous to wear silk crepe for housework. For example, see Yamakawa 1992, 122.
56. Letter, Kin to mother, Tenpō 11.9.28. Tsuneno changed her name to Kin after she married for the fourth time in Edo. Tsuneno mentions that she is working in a warrior household, but it is not clear where. On Tsuneno’s checkered employment history, see Stanley 2016.
57. Letter, Tsuneno to Kyūhachirō, Denpachi, and mother, Tenpō 11.5.22.
58. The English word *respectability* has no exact counterpart in Japanese. Nevertheless, following Woodruff D. Smith, I am using it here to refer to the outward manifestation, through grooming and behavior, of moral competence. See Smith 2002, 204–10.
59. Letter, Tsuneno to Izawa Kōtoku, undated. And, “I can’t work if I’m wearing only one silk unlined robe as I am now.” Letter, Tsuneno to Kyūhachirō, Denpachi, and mother, Tenpō 11.5.21.
60. Ihara Saikaku, “Spending a Day at the Employment Agency” (c. 1689), quoted in Chaiklin 2009, 45.
61. Tōkyō Daigaku Shiryō Hensanjo 1960, 306–7.
62. Stallybrass 1998, 192.
63. On the link between individual respectability, clothing, and family reputation in early modern Europe, see Smith 2002, 210–15.
64. Letter, Gisen to Rinsenji, Tenpō 14.9.29.
65. Letter, Fujiwara Yūzō to Rinsenji, Tenpō 15.11.13.
66. On the household’s “inside” and “outside” spaces, see Roberts 2012, 36–37.
67. Letter, Tsuneno to Rinsenji, undated.

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