

Who was Kimura Kiyoko?

Michelle Hall

In Japan during World War 2, people would often wear a *boku zukin*—an air raid hood. It was a padded cotton hood, usually hand-sewn from an old kimono, with a flap over the lower face and shoulders. Although padded cotton cannot be said to protect the head from much, often the hoods were soaked in water and worn to prevent hair or clothing from catching alight from falling embers or sparks during air raids.

One such hood has found its way into the Japanese Rare and Historical Collection in the East Asian Collection, located in the Baillieu Library at the University of Melbourne. Dr Charles Schencking, lecturer in Japanese history at the Asia Institute, was searching an



online second-hand bookstore in Japan for materials relating to air raids, and among the pamphlets and books (and even a gas mask, which we also purchased) was the air raid hood (pictured left).

On the inside front right flap is a small patch of white cotton fabric on which the owner's name, age, address and blood group are brush-written in ink:

Osaka City, Nishinari Ward,
Tengajaya,
Amami South Town Association,
Group 14.
Kimura Kiyoko, 36 years old.
Blood group B.

Who was Kiyoko,¹ and what happened to her? Contact with the Osaka City Offices demonstrated that according to Japanese law, non-family members may not access a person's family register, or *koseki*.² Besides, in the tumult and confusion of the war, who knows what might have become of Kiyoko; perhaps she was lost forever. Or perhaps she lived to a ripe old age, and her air raid hood ended up for sale after she had passed away.

The air raid hood shows us a side of the war in Japan that is rarely seen—the people taking used clothing to manufacture safety equipment for themselves. During the

war, women were required to take apart their kimonos and remake them into trousers, which are easier to work in.³

Dr Schencking's work began after his book on the Japanese navy was completed.⁴ He began work on World War 2 and the 1923 Kanto earthquake,⁵ following his research interests in disaster management. This has resulted in the East Asian Collection's acquisition of many items from the earthquake and its aftermath and about the rebuilding of Tokyo in the inter-war years (followed by the destruction of Tokyo during World War 2).

Some other items acquired are special 'earthquake editions' of magazines and newspapers, collections of photographs, official histories of the time, and a series of books of stories written by children who survived the earthquake. These were submitted to the Education Department in Tokyo as part of a commemorative event the year following the earthquake. Written by primary school students in years one to six, they are a poignant record of the disaster as seen by young eyes. Another special item is the gas mask mentioned earlier. It was also acquired from a second-hand bookseller, and is still in the original cardboard cylinder. Made of rubber



and plastic and looking quite inadequate for its purpose, it was manufactured in Showa 18 (1943).⁶ It is very unlikely that it belonged to Kimura Kiyoko, however much that prospect may appeal.

After acquisition, the hood was restored by Ms Thea Peacock, textiles conservator at the University's Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation (CCMC). Although the hood was quite faded, dusty and creased, Thea decided to stabilise the hood rather than attempt to restore it fully. The hood, therefore, while being able to be used as an object for research, also retains intact the integrity and evidence of its long existence. Conservation was funded from an agreement between the CCMC and the University.

While the idea of steam-cleaning the hood was first considered, Thea decided against it as the textile was fairly soiled, and any excess moisture may have caused staining. Some of the creases were due to the way the hood was sewn together, and others were quite deeply set in the padding, so Thea did not recommend crease removal in this case.

Finally, she suggested a padded insert cut to the shape and size of the hood to support the object internally and prevent any further creasing during storage. Thea also made an

archival box to store the object.

These unusual acquisitions—the air raid hood, gas masks, materials on the earthquake, hand-written letters—are an example of the Library acquiring items in response to the needs of researchers. This is the principal role of academic collections in action: to support teaching and research, with whatever can be obtained, and these primary sources are an essential part of research. And while an item might be acquired for a particular research project, in future years it might be the source of information for something very different. An air raid hood acquired for research on Japan during World War 2 might also be of interest to scholars of textiles, clothing design and construction, or gender studies.

I still do not know who Kimura Kiyoko is, and we may never find out. But the small part of our collection which used to belong to her will continue to help us understand many aspects of Japanese life.

Michelle Hall is the Japanese Studies Librarian in the East Asian Collection, Baillieu Library. After first living in Japan as a high school exchange student, she has been involved in studying and teaching Japanese and other Japan-related work ever since. Her other interests include the history of Japanese diet (food) and Japanese textiles.

Far left: the hood covered the wearer from well below the shoulders to across most of the face. East Asian Library Rare and Historical Materials, University of Melbourne.

Left: the patch of white cotton fabric inside the hood, displaying Kimura Kiyoko's details. East Asian Library Rare and Historical Materials, University of Melbourne.

The East Asian Library services the information, research and teaching needs of the Asia Institute (<http://www.asiainstitute.unimelb.edu.au>) as well as the Chinese studies and Japanese studies disciplines at the University of Melbourne. The East Asian Library is a member of Asian Libraries in Melbourne (<http://alim.monash.org>). The Library also services the information needs of the wider community and therefore members of the public are welcome to use its resources and facilities. The collection is staffed 8.30 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. weekdays, but the general collection may be browsed at any time the Baillieu Library is open. Rare and Historical Materials are available upon request. The East Asian Library is located on the 3rd floor of the Baillieu Library. <http://www.lib.unimelb.edu.au/collections/asian>

Notes

- 1 Japanese names in this paper are written in the Japanese form, with family name followed by given name. The character used to write 'Kiyoko' could also conceivably be pronounced 'Seiko' or 'Sumiko', but 'Kiyoko' is more common.
- 2 Osaka City Municipal Offices (Osaka-shi Shiminkyoku), email to Michelle Hall, 11 May 2007.
- 3 Mikio Kanda (ed.), *Widows of Hiroshima: The life stories of nineteen peasant wives*, translated by Taeko Midorikawa, New York: St Martin's Press, 1989.
- 4 J. Charles Schencking, *Making waves: Politics, propaganda, and the emergence of the Imperial Japanese Navy, 1868–1922*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.
- 5 The Great Kanto Earthquake (*Kanto Daishinsai*) occurred on 1 September 1923 at two minutes to midday. Most of the area around Tokyo (the Kanto plain) was destroyed.
- 6 Japanese dates are often given by the year of the current emperor's reign. The Emperor Showa (Hirohito) reigned from 1926 to 1989, thus we can render Showa 18 as 1943.