

THE CULTURE OF BLACK



KYOTO MONTSUKI Co.,Ltd.



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What is behind the color black

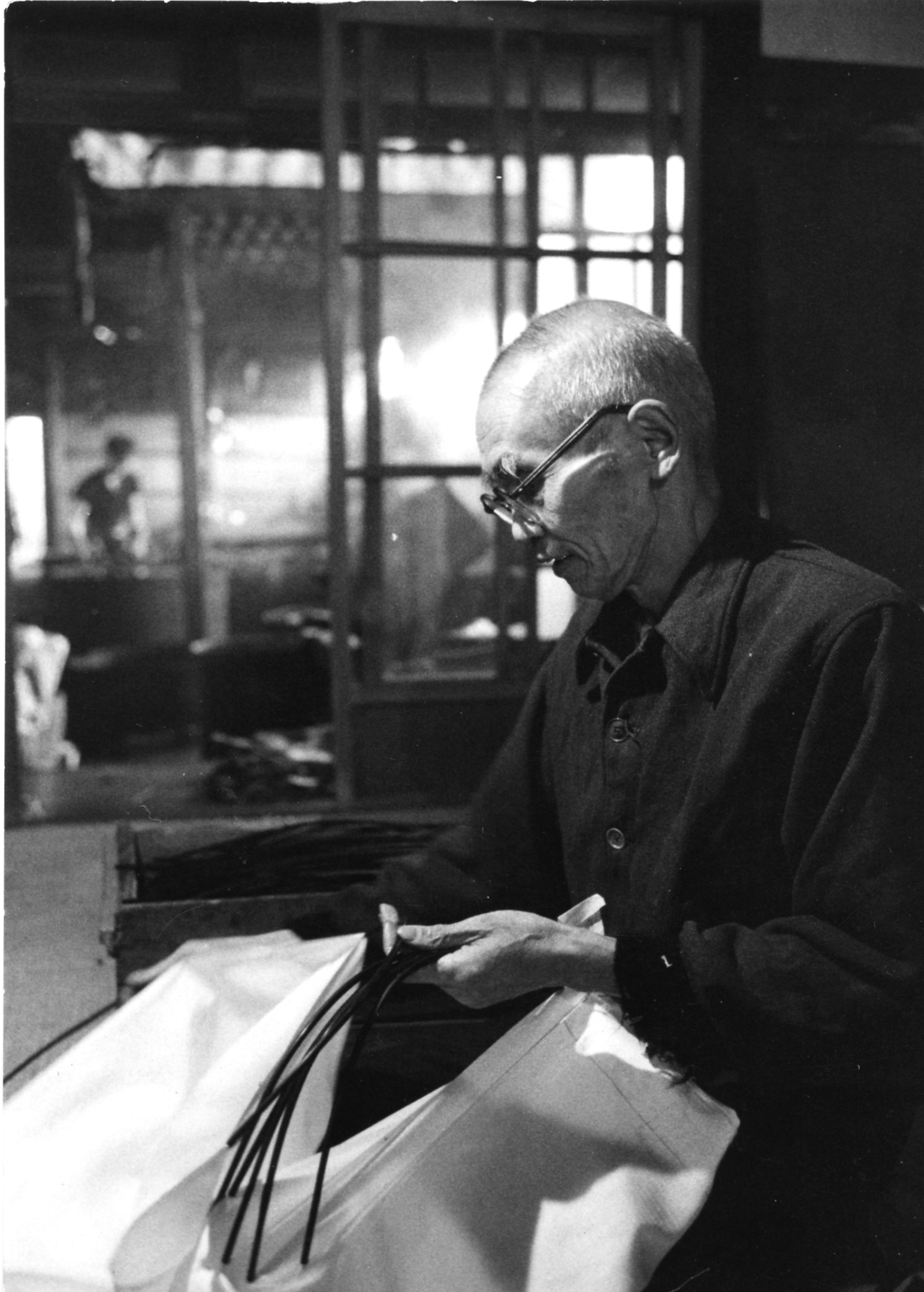
Which word do you associate with the color black? - "Strength," "dignity," "darkness," or "austerity." We observe in our daily lives that black is chosen for particular circumstances. As for clothes, for example, we choose black for a formal wear, a clerical garment, and a frock and so on. Why do we choose black, not red, blue or green for them? Certainly we have some common impression from the black in different circumstance. Where does this common impression come from?

Kyoto Montsuki Co.,Ltd is a company that has tintured only black since 1915. Our technique of tinturing advanced through the competition for realizing genuine black in black-montsuki(i.e., a formal wear of Japanese men) enables us to tincture the most genuine black in the world. At a look, the black of different black-montsukis appear the same. But some have different nuances according to the first dyeing (Kusakizome and Dorozome^{*1}) before tinturing black. Others have some meanings because they are first dyed with the materials that have some cultural backgrounds. Their differences lie in something spiritual behind the blackness finally obtained.

The ancients use the color "black" as a clue for constructing and understanding their world; they find different meanings and interpretations from the color "black" by their rich imagination and instinct; and they incorporate their findings into their lives. The culture nourished by them is not obsolete in the contemporary world where we have had many discoveries in science. Rather it is silently immersed into our lives with its own attraction.

We Kyoto Montsuki Co.,Ltd want to realize more than the blackness in appearance. We would like to realize some mysterious power that we feel wearing a black-montsuki, i.e., the power that makes us to stay straight and control over our feelings. It is the culture beyond black-montsuki, our culture about blackness itself. We think that we can create the spiritual color, which we can appreciate long time only by searching the ultimate blackness but also tinturing the culture beyond it.

Here we search for the culture about the blackness, going between the past and the present. There are both traditional blackness and modern blackness. We venture to take in modern blackness because the culture of the blackness is not only the retrospective one. We hope that you see the invisible sparkle in the blackness, knowing the origine of the color black.



The search for the color

There is the absolute definition of the blackness in the color black. It is the one that what does not reflect the light is blacker. We see colors by perceiving the reflective light from things. We distinguish colors by the volume or wavelength of it. Brightness depends on the volume of the light and color, for example red or blue, depends on the wavelength. So if we see two red colors of the same wavelength, that of highlight intensity seems more whitish and that of low-light intensity seems darker.

Here we imagine the color like the reddest "red" or the bluest "blue". We can expect these colors as those that have the wavelength of red or blue and have the decent light intensity. In fact, we cannot define clearly the reddest "red" or the bluest "blue" because our perceptions are different among each other. In the case of the color black, however, we can define the blackest "black" as *the color that does not reflect any light*, for what does not reflect the light seems blacker. *The color that does not reflect any light* is just the theoretical one, but it is clear that the closer to this definition, the blacker. So the black is supposed to be the stoic color that we are allowed to search for.

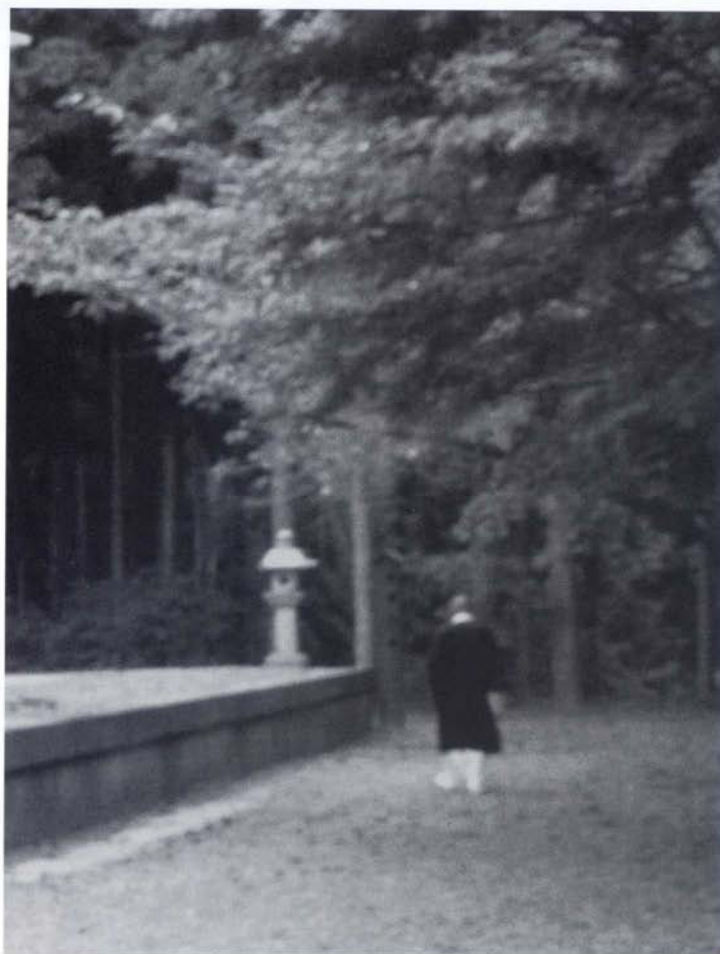
The history of black-montsuki is that of the search for the blackness. In Japan, black-montsukis have been said to be the symbol of the *nobility*. We have to perform bottoming again and again to create the depth of black color, so the black oxide finish needs plenty of dye, and then it becomes very expensive. In past technique, the clothing fabric becomes very rough and tough by the series of bottoming, so it is said that the cloth made of the black oxide finish would not be cut with a sword. But it was very difficult to tincture clothing fabric "black". If we lay "black" clothing side-by-side, the darker one seems blacker and the subtler one seems grayer, so it has been considered the blacker montsuki is, the higher its quality is. Thus the competition of the blackness has upgraded the Japanese black oxide finish to the highest level in the world.





Invisible existence, color of nothing

Our eyes see the world through perceiving light. If the perception of light is seeing, the color "black" is supposed to be the one that our eyes does not perceive light most, that is, the most invisible one. And that the ultimate black is *the color that does not reflect any light* means that it is also the *invisible* existence. In the 20th century, human beings revealed only one ultimate black exists in this world. It is the being that swallow down everything, even the light, that is, the black hole. Once the light is taken in, it cannot escape from the black hole, so we never see the light absorbed in the black hole. *The being that does not reflect any light*, the black hole, can be the ultimate black. Actually we can see "black" color as the *invisible being* revealed by the modern science in Japanese traditional performing arts; puppeteers in Bunraku play (Japanese traditional puppet play), assistants to kabuki players on the stage, that is, *Kurogo*^{*2} (*assistants in black dress*). In these traditional performing arts, like Bunraku or Kabuki, there is a rule that black thing is invisible and that *Kurogo* in black dress is also the invisible being. If you do not know this rule, you cannot enjoy the play, distracted by *Kurogo*. Assistants cannot disappear actually, but they dress in black and become "invisible" or "not being on the stage". Through such an intellectual rule, Kabuki or Bunraku extracts beautiful illusion from the stage.



The color of eternalness

While our ancestor recognized invisible meanings and values behind the things more than visible, they gave the meanings to the things by taking "black" into their life and expressed their will dressed in black. Though there have been many interpretations on color black, "black" is especially never dyed by other colors, so it is often treated as the color of eternalness. For example, the daily clothes of Buddhism monks are black frocks called *sumizome*. Black is the color that includes warnings in order to achieve the sacredness by the scared will of gods and Buddha, free from carnal desire, and it plays the role of the skin, which shut out the color of the world. And it is said that the custom that Japanese women in the Edo Era (1603-1867) painted their teeth black was derived from the samurai's custom in the Sengoku Era (1497-1573) that samurais showed their allegiance to their sovereign, their single-hearted devotion.

This notion of "black" as the color of eternalness is widely common in the world, so it still remains strongly. Even today, a clerical garment of judge is black, as a symbol of the absolute fairness, for the black color *cannot be dyed by any other color*.



- *1 plant dyeing : Flowers and grasses contain excellent pigments. Dyed with the liquid extracted from flower petals, leave, trunk and so on, there are various colors according to the kind of the plants. Indigo, safflower and turmeric(Indian saffron) are representative.

Dorozome : This is the oldest dyeing technique in Japan, and it is said that Japanese already performed this before Nara period(710-794). In Dorozome, we break down mud containing substances into smaller particle as tiny as possible to use. Amami Islanders and Kume Islanders are performing this technique even now.

- *2 Kurogo : In Japanese traditional play , for example, Joruri , Bunraku(puppet play) and Kabuki and so on, *kurogos* assist the movements of puppets or actors and take properties in and out. They are all in black dress head-to-toe and never appear on center stage.



The culture appreciates the darkness

The color of those Japanese sweet jellybeans becomes more meditative, put in the lacquer-ware cake box and sunk in the darkness, which only allows us to distinguish the color of the skin. When people taste that cold soft jelly in their mouth, they must feel as if the indoor darkness would melt on the tip of the tongue, being one sweet dollop and believe that an extraordinary hearty taste adds to the jelly beans. which would not be so delicious actually.

-From *In Praise of Shadows* by Junichiro Tanizaki-

It would be related to the fact that our life is familiar to darkness that people in the past took *black* into our culture as *invisible being*. Junichiro Tanizaki, in his book *In Praise of Shadows*, citing examples of food, clothing and shelter, wrote on Japanese common aesthetic feeling in their life and showed that Japanese beauty's self, which is strongly connected to the darkness. They do not expose everything to the light of day, but feel the bottomless depth in the darkness, in tone, where even the border is the ambiguous. This sensitivity that allows us to perceive more than visible is supposed to be the base of our aesthetic feeling that we can recognize the meanings and values behind the visible things and respect them.

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The color of night

As the ancient people recognized "darkness" in the "black", "black" as the color of "night" must lurk behind our life. Of course even now we often use black to express night. And there is one familiar but forgotten usage of "black" as the color of "night" because it would be expressed in a highly abstract way and its origin is so old. It is the black of the *go* stones.

The stones and board used in the game of *go*. It is said that the game of *go* originated from a tool of astronomy and divination lore in ancient China. All 361 grids on *go* board represents the number of the days of old calendar, the white *go* stones are days and the black ones are night. The game of *go* was a tool in order to understand the calendar. This calendar is not a solar one used now but a lunar one decided by the phases of the moon. In Japan, the moon was familiar among people and the lunar calendar had been commonly used until Meiji Era (1868-1912). Even now in the game of *go* black has an initiative, which originated from the fact that New Year in the old calendar starts at the time of the Rat in the Oriental Zodiac, that is, in the midnight. In addition, in the game of *go*, the white and black stones are put alternately on the board, which reflects the repetition of the day and night. we play *go* without knowing these things, but *go* has such a surprising history.



Black eyes, invariable value

The last "black" we talk about is the color of our eyes, black eye. In point of fact, there is the very reason we Kyoto Montsuki Co.,Ltd focus on the bottoming in this "black eye", to be exact, the black part called iris. The "black" color of our eyes is the "black" related to our color sensation.

When the light we perceive goes into the eye, the iris around the pupil, which is the entrance of the light, works as the aperture of the lens and regulate the volume of the light to let into the eye. This allows us to keep off the stimulation from excess light. In order for pupils to fulfill this role, however, all parts other than pupils need to shut out the light completely. Then melanin pigment works as an effective shield against sunlight. Melanin pigment is the dark brown pigment in our hair and skin that keeps off the stimulation from the sunlight and we can find it much more in eyes, hair and skin of the people who have evolved in the area where the sunlight is stronger and the time of exposure to the sunlight longer. Sunburn increases the amount of melanin pigment, so women tend to hate it, but irises that have much melanin pigment can adjust light effectively. Therefore, the black eyes that have much melanin pigment in the irises can be sensible of every nuance in colors, for they can introduce the proper amount of light into the inside through pupils.

Of course, these black eyes should have had no small effect on our sense of color; we find beauty in nuance-filled colors and love the uniform tone, like the world under the moonlight. Also Japan has four seasons, so plants change their color, as new leaves, green leaves, autumn leaves and fallen leaves, and the color around them in response to the change of the season. With these changes, the temperature do the same; warm, hot, cool and cold. Thus we Japanese, having adapted to transitionally changing environments, have very fine sensibility of color.

The black oxide finish of Kyoto Montsuki Co., Ltd has various kinds of bottoming, madder, indigo, tea leaves, and so on. Each bottoming has own specific black texture. All of these colorful bottoming contribute to create deep black color. Kyoto Montsuki Co.,Ltd stick to nuances in the blackness, not only with traditional values, but also with necessity to satisfy the acute eyes cultivated in this transitionally changing environments. This physical and environmental sense of color is the invariable and stable standard of value, so it is the very natural commitment of us.



CORPORATE PROFILE

90 years with the technique of the black oxide finish

Since the foundation in 1915, we have pursued blackness earnestly and what black oxide finish should be. We always do not settle for the present quality, but think seriously what black oxide finish should be for our customers, that is, what kind of black Montsukis would we like to put on if we wear them. Our concept is "genuine article oriented company". Not searching for profits nor just good-looking Montsuki, but we provide genuine Montsuki that will surely satisfy our customers.

The "real" Montsuki we think is;

Montsuki with a lifetime guarantee as for dyeing
Using ecological dye compound, caring for the environment
Colorfast Montsuki even in rainy climate or in the broiling weather

We think that Montsukis that meet these conditions would serve our customers for many years to come. With a constant challenge to enhance our quality and technical levels of dyeing wholeheartedly, we would like to serve you with "traditional genuine articles".



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| 1915 | The foundation as Arakawa dyeing factory at the present location by the founder Kinnosuke Arakawa. |
| 1969 | Kyoto Montsuki Co.,Ltd founded by 2nd Tadao Arakawa |
| 1978 | Presentation of the revolutionary dyeing for a deep color as " <i>Junguro</i> (genuine black)" and release the first product with deep color dyeing. This remarkable black was beyond the imagination of other dyeing companies, which could not imitate this color with their technique. This invention established the evaluation of our high technical level. |
| 1981 | Development of the hit product, " <i>Midoroguro</i> ", this enabled us to create a foothold in this industry segment and led to the present position, with a market share exceeding 60%. |
| 1989 | Under the order of Imperial Household Agency to produce the costumes " <i>Omizome</i> " for the funeral ceremony of Emperor Showa, reproduce the costume with the dyeing technique of ancient times, using the wild indigo in <i>Kyoto Iwashimizu Hachiman Shrine</i> . |
| 1996 | Developed first ecological dye compound and revolutionary high quality dyeing technique " <i>kurozome kakumei</i> " in this industry segment. We release this clear-sighted dyeing technique as genuine oriented project, with a high regard for the wearability. |
| 1996 | Present president Toru Arakawa newly installed as 4th president. |
| 2001 | Requested by an apparel company in kyoto, started the research for applying the traditional black oxide finish to dyeing modern dress material. After about six months, we developed the extraordinary dark black oxide finish. We named it " <i>shinkuro</i> " and registered the trademark, " <i>Onkuro someshi</i> ". The apparel company in kyoto has commercialized it and sells the products. |

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