

Edo-murasaki : Edo purple

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Although Edo purple generally refers to the purple more bluish in shade compared to *Kyo-murasaki* [Kyoto purple] Seiki Nagasaki speculates in his book *Nihon no dento shoku* [The Japanese Traditional Colors] that the Edo purple probably emerged as a reddish purple and came to refer to a more bluish color in the later time. In my attempt to consider how the Edo purple could have been historically, I studied the purple headband used in a Kabuki masterpiece *Sukeroku*, and conducted a dye project to re-create the color with the *shikon* dye.

To find out the color of purple headband in the present kabuki theatre, I visited Toshikazu Kamoji, the representative director/chairperson of Tokyo Kamoji Tokoyama Co., Ltd, the hairdresser specialized in Kabuki hairpieces. The purple headband that they showed me was the one used by *Ebizo Ichikawa* at the performance commemorating his stage name succession in 2004. Its color was a synthetically dyed dark bluish purple, close to navy, difficult to obtain from natural *shikon* dye. Next I visited the National Theatre of Japan to view *Ukiyoes* from three different historical periods, Bunka and Bunsei eras (1804-1830), the final years of Edo period(-1867), and the Meiji period (1868-1912). The *ukiyoes* depicts the headband as a pale reddish purple in the Bunka and Bunsei eras, bluish purple at the end of Edo period, and navy-ish purple in the Meiji period; the shade gradually inclined blue as the time progresses. Among the *ukiyoes* of the late Edo period, I found a color similar to the *shikon* dye that I had seen, so I decided to use this shade as the reference color for the project.

Shikon is a root of *Lithospermum erythrorhizon*, and dyed using rice vinegar and camellia ash. This dye method is described in various documents from the Edo period as well as in the *Engishiki*, a classic statute compiled during the Heian period (794-1185) that includes detailed descriptions of dye ingredients. For this project, I used valuable *Shikon* from Hokkaido and camellia ash that I made at my studio. After thoroughly squeezing out the dye from the roots by hands, I repeated the process of dyeing and soaking in camellia ash bath--in the manner that would make a bluish shade--over twenty times, spending four days to achieve the shade that resembles the headband in the *ukiyoe*.