"Tabi" Foot Coverings

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https://eeOr.com/sca/wafuku/tabi.pdf

Tabi are Japanese foot coverings that have a split between the big toe and other toes to accommodate thong footwear like "zori", "waraji", and "geta". They are a staple of Japanese costume from ancient times until today. They are appropriate for both men and women, although in period men seem to have more leeway in terms of color, while women mostly wore white tabi.

Modern tabi typically
- Are open up the back at the heel,
- Close using a hook-and-eye arrangement,
- Frequently have rubbery soles so they can be worn alone.
  (Soled tabi are called "jika tabi" and are not appropriate for indoor use.)

Tabi are even available today that imitate Western boots and sneakers, but with a toe split.

Historically, tabi
- Open in front like Western footwear,
- Close using "himo" (tied cords) or nothing,
- Are worn with other footwear when resilient soles are required.

With outdoor footwear removed, tabi can be worn inside the home or other buildings.

As the illustration from the Edo period armoring manual, "Tanki Yoriaku" shows on page 2, tabi with a front opening were common even as recently as the 18th century. In that illustration, the tabi have no closures of their own, and are held in place by the "kyahan" leg coverings that are worn over them.

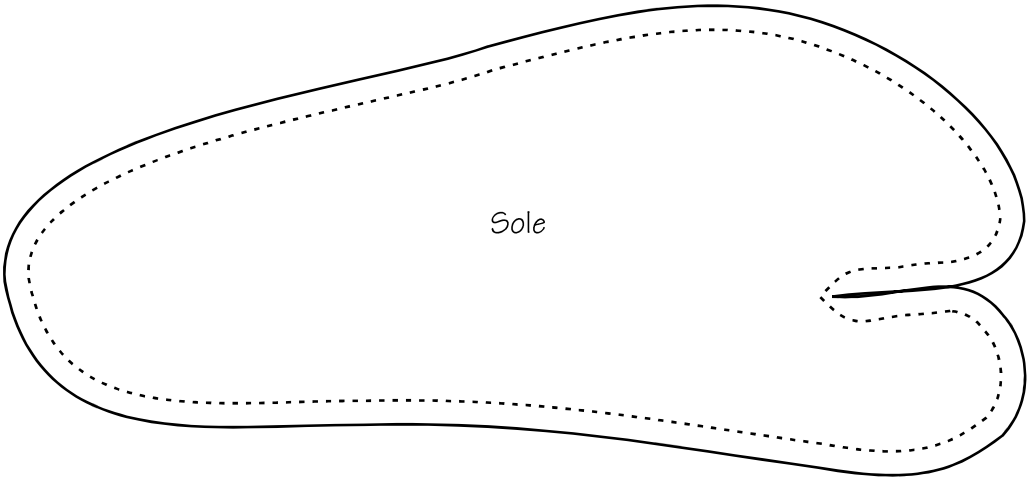
In any period, tabi can be made out of nearly any suitable material. Tabi from hides like doeskin were common for hunting or worn under armored foot coverings. Formal tabi in white linen or silk were common for indoor pursuits. I tend to make my tabi using extra fabric from garment projects, as not much fabric is needed and scraps from separate projects can be used for different parts of the tabi. Linen is good, as heavy linen is easy to find, quite durable, but still breathable.

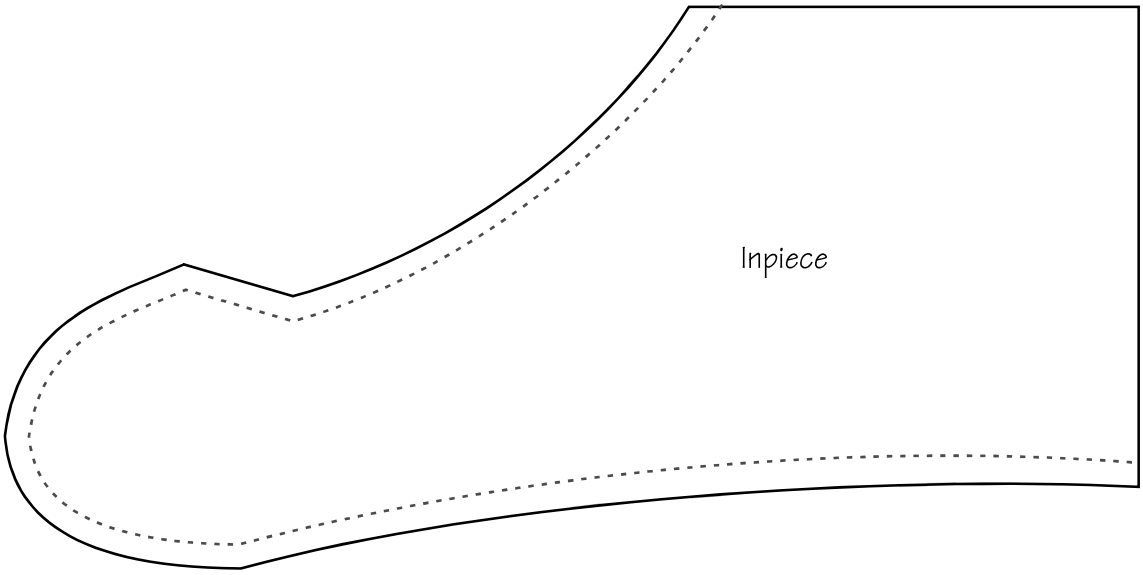
This class presents a pattern for a practical fabric tabi for SCA wear. This pattern is based on the one found in "Make Your Own Japanese Clothes" by John Marshall, though the pattern and instructions have been modified to close in front instead of in back. John Marshall's instructions for modifying the pattern to fit the shape of your foot are worth the purchase price of the book. Folkwear pattern number 129, "Japanese Hapi and Haori" also includes a cutting pattern and instructions for fabric tabi.

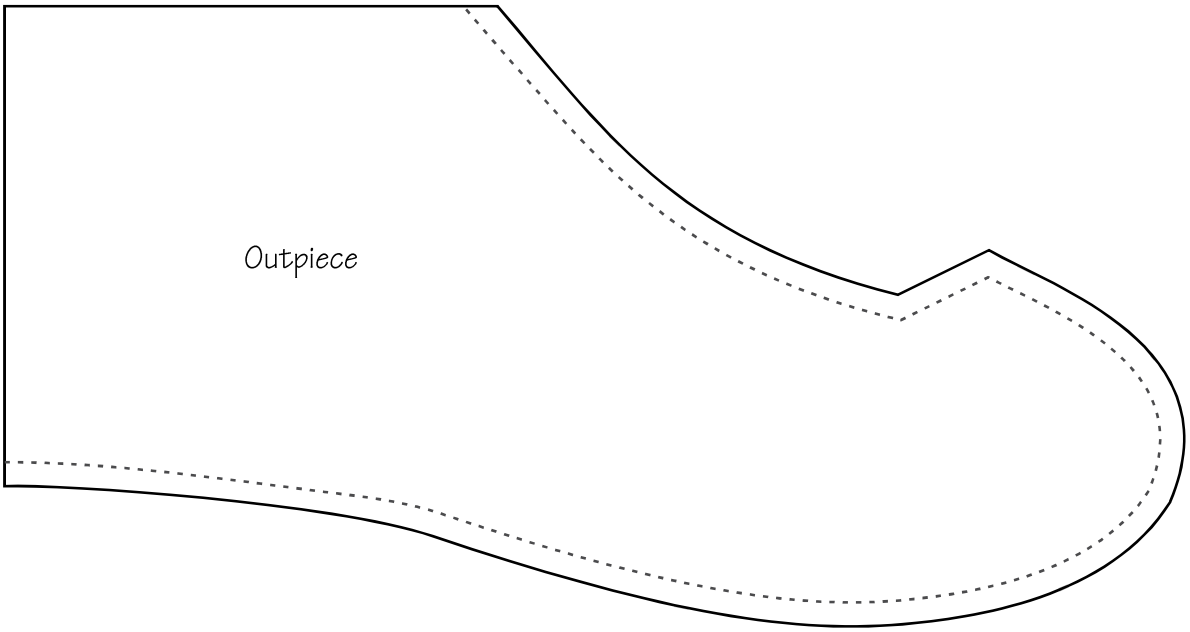
Those with full-time Japanese personae should expect to make one pair of tabi per year. They make a good traveling project as they are small and can be sewn by hand. Tabi do wear out (mostly in the sole) and suffer much from proximity to the ground (mud, dust, spilled drinks). Having more tabi means any individual pair is worn less, though you will find that new tabi are completed about as rapidly as old tabi are discarded. Repairs such as sole patching are possible, and soles can be covered with leather or liquid rubber for greater durability.

Tabi Examples

Cutting Patterns







Sizing and Cutting

Cutting patterns are approximations of shape only. You will need to scale patterns up by approximately 200% and modify shape until dotted stitching lines fit your feet. Attach inpiece and outpiece patterns at vertical line in center back before cutting fabric. Do not forget to modify shape of upper to match any changes to sole. Cut and construct a single lining from scrap fabric or muslin to check modifications before starting. You will also need a "quarter panel" of fabric (a rectangle about four inches wide) at least four feet long to make the ties.

Construction

1. Prepare the ties.
    a. Fold tie fabric in half down long axis and press.
    b. Fold edges of fabric in to center of fold and press.
    c. Cut tie material into two equal-length pieces.
    d. Open folded fabric, fold in ends about 1/2" and press.
    e. Re-fold ties, and press.
    f. Fold each tie in half lengthwise and press to create center marks.
2. Start with a liner, and carefully choose left or right orientation.
3. Close lower top seam of liner between inpiece and outpiece, including between toes.
4. Repeat step 3. with shell inpiece and outpiece.
5. Turn liner and shell right sides out, and pin lower top seams together
6. Sew liner and shell together along sides of upper top seam.
7. Turn shell to inside of liner so that sole edges of liner and shell match up and seam allowances of opening are trapped between layers.
8. Pin liner and shell sole pieces together wrong sides together.
9. Pin upper to sole, shell sides together, carefully matching curves.
10. Sew sole to upper all the way around, even between big and other toes.
12. Evert both tabi so that shell sides are out, tucking toe caps into place.
13. Take one tie, place center mark at outside center back of top opening and tuck top edge of tabi into fold of tie.
14. Pin tie along edge of top opening.
12. Sew along full length of tie, closing ends and attaching tie to tabi opening.

Repeat steps for second tabi, <u>making sure to reverse the orientation</u> of liner and shell.