

EMBROIDERY

The art of Embroidery in Japan was undoubtedly of foreign origin. In the seventh century Indian embroidery had found its way into Japan, but it cannot be definitely assumed that the art was originally introduced through Indian influence, primarily because Chinese embroidery at the same time was in an advanced state. *as shown by the Han fragments found at Loulan.* George Audsley says: "the earliest Japanese embroidery show no direct evidences of Indian art teaching in design or execution, while there is much that links them with Chinese examples of a kindred class".

From the earliest known epoch of the art, the embroiderers of Kioto have been the most celebrated, and they appear to have invariably been men. The introduction of Buddhism into Japan from Korea, which took place about the middle of the sixth century, gave great encouragement to this art. In the Nihongi (Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to 697 A.D.) there

(450 A.D - Baunkley vol I p. 84 :

By this time the policy of specially importing skilled aid direct from China had been inaugurated, & large bodies of female weavers & embroiderers were invited to settle in Japan.

is given this statement: "13th year(605), Summer, 4th month, 1st

day. The Empress (Suiko) commanded the Prince Imperial (Prince Shotoku), the Oho-omi, and also the Princess and Ministers, all to

make a vow together, and therewithal to begin to make copper and

embroidery images of Buddha(nui-botoke), sixteen feet high, one
One of the oldest & most famous panels of silk embroidery, dated by documentary evidence from the Suiko epoch is a small fragment of
of each". Very little information is obtainable of the primitive

methods of Japanese embroideries though mention has been found

that the art had reached a state of perfection during the

Nara Period(646-794 A.D.) and continued to be practiced through

subsequent periods in spite of the fact that many of the methods

of superstructural dyeing were lost. This was due primarily to

the freedom allowed in the technique and the ease with which

decoration could be achieved. The art reached its height during

the latter part of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth

centuries, surpassing in richness of design and careful execution

any of those produced in subsequent years. The objects on which

- 1- Nihongi (Chronicles of Japan from earliest times to A.D 607) Transl. from Original Chinese & Japanese by W.G. Aston. Supplement I
Volume II p. 133
+ - Iwano, Naitaka
Somuro Akashi - p 37

(Transactions & Proceedings of the Japan Society
of London)
London 1896.
Publ. by Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner &
Co Ltd.

what originally was a picture of the Western Paradise known as
 the Tenjukoku - mandara. This is now preserved in the chuga chugu-ji
 nunnery at Nara.

+ A.D. Samuel Smith - p. 3 - for further information.

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1- History of Japanese Art, Volume II, p. 133
 (Translation & Introduction of Japanese Art)
 by W. G. Aston, Supplement I
 London 1896.
 Publ. by Japan Press, Tokyo, 1924.

the embroiderers lavished their greatest skill were the kimono, obi and the fukusa. The fukusa were richly woven squares, sometimes hung with tassels, and used for covering ceremonial presents. The present was always conveyed in a box over which a fukusa was thrown. The receiver of the ^{gift} ~~present~~ returned the box with the fukusa to the donor. ^R ~~The~~ ^{was} satin stitch principally used in combination with the couching and floss, combined and twisted threads were employed according to the particular requirement of the design. There were instances where embroidery only was relied upon for the design, yet it was customary to add complicated and plastic effects by combining embroidery with knot dyeing, haku oki (applique of gold leaf) or painted dyeing.

Toward the latter part of the seventeenth century when luxury of dress reached its highest point in Japan, embroidery was lavishly used on both plain silk materials and woven brocades of silk and gold. The designs on the costumes worn

by the aristocracy were of a rich and refined character, chiefly of a floral nature, embroidered in delicate harmonious colours, upon crepes and thin silks of quiet tints. On the other hand, the theatrical dresses and those worn by courtesans were of the most sensational character, their designs presenting every object the artists of the time could press into service. At this time also, the embroidery of fukusa attained its highest excellence. These squares of rich silk were made the recipients of the popular artists' thoughts and the painstaking manipulation

of the embroiderers. - *The designs for embroidery were often those of celebrated artists - e.g. Kano Tanyū (1602-74), Ogata Korin (1653-1710) and Hishikawa Moronobu (d. 1714 ?) - (Kemp. P. 361)*

During the Tokugawa regime the embroiderers of Kioto produced articles for three classes, these were the Court nobles, citizens at large and the country folk. With the decline of the feudal system the art of embroidery has shown a marked decline.

Embroidery stitches: ^{the} frequent use of untwisted silk threads (floss)

With the exception of a few minor stitches, those used by the Japanese are identical to those of the western world. Distinction in this field has been recognized not only because of the methods by which they are applied, singly or in combination, but in their combination with other techniques of superstructural decoration which give the embroidered cloths a distinct Japanese character. *The whole design often drawn in outline with thin black ink often visible in areas where threads have worn away.*

1- Long regular stitches usually running diagonally side by side in nearly parallel lines so as to produce a satin effect. Both floss and twisted silks ^{are} ~~were~~ used according to the effect desired. This type of stitch is used in introducing the graceful, curved sweeps of varying width in representing waves, spray, feathers, plumage and snow. - *called Kiri oshi*

see fig-----

2- Long and short stitches fitted in between each other to give the appearance of overlapping. Fine floss silk

is generally used. Gradations of colour and round shading is achieved by mixing yarns of varying tints.

see fig_____

3-Knotted stitch: in this technique, the needle is drawn up at the spot where the knot is wanted, and the thread wound round it several times. The point is pushed through the fabric close to where it was drawn and the needle is pulled from the underside with the right hand, while the thread is held fast with the left until the knot is secured. This stitch is often used to cover whole pieces. *Similar to the European French knot but used*

see fig_____

4-Couching: this includes all work in which thread of gold or silks are laid side by side on the surface of the fabric and stitched down by thin silk thread. Beautiful effects are achieved especially when shaded or mixed twisted silk thread or floss is used. The gold used is made of very narrow strips of gilded paper twisted around cotton or silk thread, though

often the flat strips are used. The Japanese employ couching
to a greater extent than do the embroiderers of other nations.

see fig _____

"Flat Stitch" 2

Nui-haku: embroidery combined with applique of gold leaf.

fig 39, 40, 41, 42 Mich. Mus. Publications.

Nuishibori: embroidered knot-dyeing

Shibori nuihaku: embroidery combined with knot dyeing and

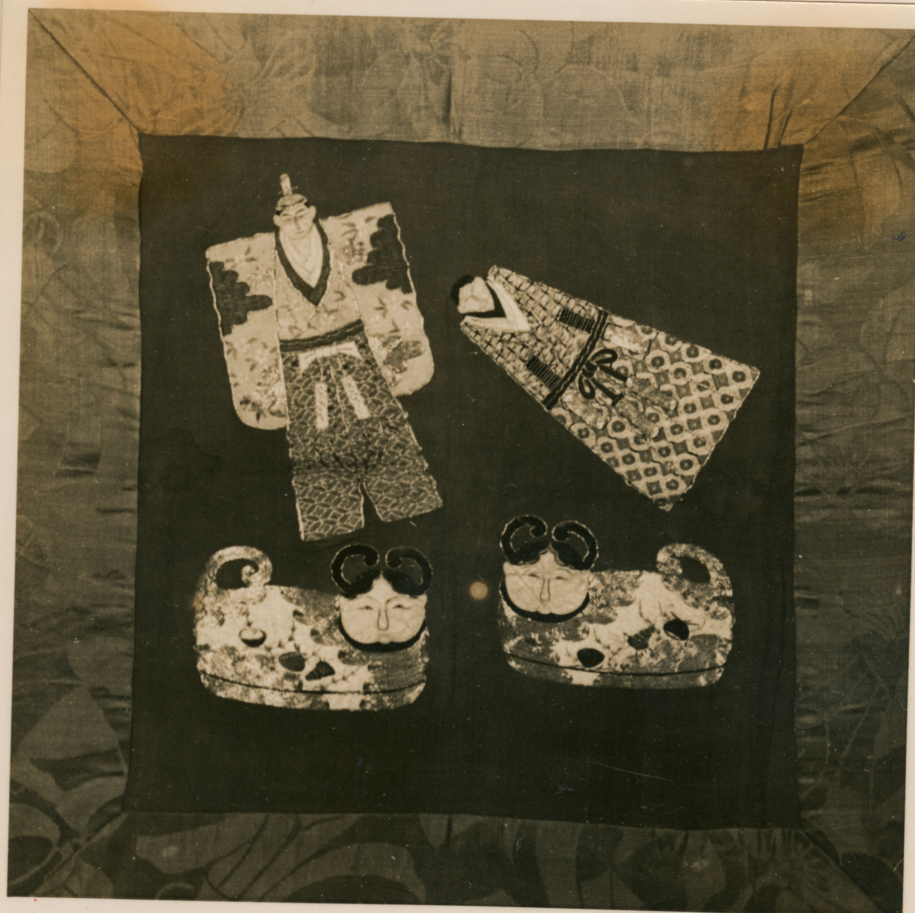
applique of gold leaf.

Applique(kittsuke) frequently used in Japanese embroidery.

see fig.

- 1-application of embroidered figures to surfaces.
- 2- " " metal plates
- 3- " " pieces of glass.

moulded over padding



Appliqued Embroidered figure