

A HISTORICAL SKETCH OF JAPANESE BROCADES.

Nishiki is a term applied to one of the earliest forms of brocade woven in Japan. They were always woven on a hand loom with silk threads of blue, red, yellow, purple and many other colors, and were always of rich and beautiful design. The word Nishiki, in fact, means "beautiful combinations of colors" so that the color prints produced in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were called Nishiki-ye.

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Nishiki were first introduced to Japan in the year 238 A. D. The Empress Jingo, the year following her triumphal return from San-Kwang, Korea, sent an embassy to the Chinese Emperor Ming-Ti of the Wei Dynasty. Among the presents which he sent the Empress were five rolls of beautiful Nishiki^{1.} with the design of a dragon woven on a crimson ground.

It was however, two centuries before Nishiki were woven in Japan. In 463 A. D. the Emperor Yuryaku, desiring to establish a loom in Japan, sent an embassy to Korea accompanied by Kwaninchiri, a Korean weaver who had lived in Japan, to study the Korean weaving techniques. The head of the embassy died before their return but Kwaninchiri returned with the skillful Korean weaver, Joanna of Kuroda, who established a loom at Momohara in the province of Kawachi. Here, during his lifetime, he wove many beautiful Nishiki which were called Kara-Nishiki (Korean-^{foreign}Nishiki) or Kawachi Nishiki. *after the province*

The title Nishikibe-no-muraji (family producing the Nishiki *meaning the*

1- Print, Alan - p. 15-16

brocade) was conferred upon him. His family became famous as weavers, and since that time the town where their loom was established has been known as Nishikibe-no-go.

In the two centuries following, the art of weaving Nishiki underwent great improvement at Nishikibe-no-go. Such poetical names as Taihakuzan-Nishiki (Great White Mountain Brocade) and Shohakuzan-Nishiki (Little White Mountain Brocade) were given to the beautiful brocades woven. Other pieces were named from the design, as the Kurumagata-Nishiki, which had the Kuruma or Wheel pattern; Kirin-Nishiki, having the Kirin design, which is a fabulous, horned monster always represented in the midst of flames.^{2.}

About the middle of the 7th century, Emperor Kotoku established a department of Nishiki weaving at Nara, then, the capital of Japan, a department which for centuries remained under Imperial patronage. This department of weaving was known as the Oribe-no-tsukasa. One of the most famous of the Nishiki produced by this loom during this period was Un^rgen-Nishiki (Sunset Clouds), which was copied from a specimen of Kasumi-Nishiki (Valley Mist) presented to the Emperor Temmu by a Korean minister in the tenth year of Hakuho (681 A. D.).^{3.} - Alan Priest p.16

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from
Priest?

The management of the Nishiki weavers remained for centuries in charge of the Oribe-no-tsukasa. In the first year of the Keiun era, 704 A. D., we find that there was woven at the command of the Empress Genmei for the great shrine of

of the imperial ancestors at Ise (Ise-Dai-Jingu) the famous Kwashi-Nishiki, the poetical name of which signifies "nest of Ho-wo birds". During the reign of Empress Genmei, great impetus was given to the industry of Nishiki weaving as well as that of other textiles by sending out teachers or masters of weaving to the surrounding provinces of central Japan where raw silk of excellent quality was abundant. In this way looms were established in each of the following provinces: Ise, Owari, Mikawa, Suruga, Idzu, Omi, Echizen, Tanba, Tajima, Inaba, Hoki, Harima, Bizen, Bitchu, Bingo, Aki, Kii, Awa, Iyo, Sanuki, Idzumo.

- Priest - p. 16

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furniture.

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In 794 A. D. the capital was moved from Nara to Kyoto, (which was then known as Heian-Jo) In the following eleven centuries Kyoto continued to be not only the capital of Japan but the center of all art production. The Emperor assigned the Oribe-no-Tsukasa a quarter in the northwestern part of the city near the Uzumasa Temple. Its area was restricted to two hundred by four hundred feet. Here the weaving of Nishiki continued under imperial patronage and every encouragement was offered to produce more beautiful examples of Nishiki.

The Imperial Treasury at Nara contains specimens of brocade of the 6th century with designs designated by names and weaves.

Fierce political struggles during the eras of Sho-hei and Tenkei, 931 to 946 A. D., brought about a temporary cessation of all industries. The Oribe-no-tsukasa continued

- x - Crewdson - p. 9
- Tapestry Weaving - Japan Mag. 1910 vol I p. 589.
- ⊗ - Alan Priest - p. 16

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In specimens (Tampyo gise) preserved at Shosoin + Horyu, which
 ground is of a delicate & minute weave, either plain or twill, this
 the weaver designs are of a different colour from that of the
 ground. Those in which both ground & design are with the warp
 far exceed those in which the design are with the weft.

With the Nara period - brocades woven by this method are comparatively
 rare, those in which designs are with the weft being far
 more numerous. The method of warp designs tending to become
 restricted to the mtg. of striped materials & those where the
 colours are arranged in gradation (Uzen-gaishiki)

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to produce Nishiki in only very small quantities, while the industry in the provinces died out. As a consequence, in the following period there was a large importation of Nishiki and other costly brocades from China, and it soon became the fashion for all the nobles to wear Chinese brocades, which were generally called Kara-ori or Kara-Nishiki, while the domestic specimens were called Yamato-Nishiki.

* In the eleventh century, there was brought to Japan from China by returning Japanese students a new form of brocade, the Kinran. This was woven in characteristically Chinese patterns, with flat gold threads on a silk ground, and soon came to be much used by the Buddhist priests and nobles (Kuge) for vestments. In the Kinran, the flat gold threads consist of a very fine tough paper made from the bark of the Ko-zu tree. "Sheets of this paper called Torino-Ko are stretched and coated with size prepared from a certain type of seaweed. When dry they are smoothed by means of being rubbed with the fibrous portion of a gourd which has been decayed in water; then coated with size and covered with gold leaf. The leaves of gold are gently pressed with wadding to lay them evenly, allowed to become thoroughly dry, and finally rubbed over with cotton wool dipped in colza oil. At this stage the sheets are ready for shredding. They are accurately cut in stripes averaging about seventy five to the inch".⁵ Thus was made the gold thread which was woven into the Kinran and which formed its characteristic feature.

5: Andsley, George: p. 21 v. 1:2

In 1315, the fourth year of the Showa era, a great Shinto temple, Hiyoshi-Jinsha, was built at Sakamoto, in the province of Omi, by order of the Emperor Hanazono. In its execution, the greatest masters of all the arts were employed. The Nishiki for its decoration were woven by celebrated-weavers had their looms in Kyoto. Later in this same period Nishiki weaving became almost a lost art, but occasionally some fine brocades were executed in the old style by special order of the Emperor as contributions to the great Ise shrine. ✓

For fifty six years of the fourteenth century a severe war between two imperial dynasties of the north and south devastated the country and it was only when, by the victory of the northern dynasty, Yoshimitsu of the Ashikaga family became Shogun that a general revival of the arts of peace followed. But as the imported Chinese brocades were popular this did not extend to the textiles.

The Ashikaga Shogun Yoshimasa (1444-1473), a grandson of Yoshimitsu, was the greatest patron of art during this Japanese Renaissance, which drew much of its inspiration from the Sung art of China and the high ideals of Zen Buddhism. At his retreat in the monastery of Ginkakuji, Yoshimasa surrounded himself with the famous artists of the time, Sesshu and Soami. He was a celebrated Chajin or master of the tea ceremony, a keen collector of the fine arts, and an especial lover of Chinese art. From his example, the nobles, too, acquired a love for art and encouraged its importation.

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Fragments of the beautiful and rich brocades imported from China during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries are still preserved in the temples of Nara and Kyoto with religious care.

The specimens of Kinran imported from China about the time of the Bunmei era, 1469-1488, A. D., are called Ko-Kinran (Old Kinran) and at a later period were very highly valued. This is well illustrated in a story told by Saikaku, who died in the sixteenth year of Genroku era, 1703. He tells how a small merchant named Kikuya, in order to obtain some of these rare Ko-Kinran which had been used as shrine ornaments in the Hase temple, Yamato, until they had become very dirty and tattered, became acquainted with a priest and induced him to exchange the old brocades for some new Nishiki of brighter colors, with which the priest was very delighted. Then, Kikuya sold the old specimens for ten times more than he had spent in acquiring them.

Among the more famous varieties of these Chinese Ko-Kinran some received their names from the pattern or design, as Ryu-Kwa (dragon in the midst of flames), Kensaki-Ryu (dragon twined about a spear); others were known by the name of the family for which they were especially made, as Ton-Da, Waku-Da, and O-saka etc. Among other patterns of the Ko-Kinran were arabesques of peony flowers and vines. Here the design was done on a large scale and was known as O-Dzuru.

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Kinran and Nishiki in the Ming method were first woven in Japan in the Tensho era (1573-1591) when a Chinese weaver established looms at Sakai near Osaka. Here the Japanese learned the art of weaving Kinran and Nishiki and soon executed very fine specimens, Sakai remained the center of this industry for a time.

When Hideyoshi Toyotomi became the Shogun in 1585 he did not neglect textile weaving in his patronage of arts. Many new looms were established and the center of weaving was established at Nishijin, a district of Kyoto. As to the distinguishing characters of the designs of Japanese brocades of this time, we must remember that with certain exceptions, such as altar cloths, priests' robes, and the ceremonial dresses for Noh dances, all brocades were made for personal clothing, where, as a rule, smaller designs were preferred; for according to the Japanese proverb - "kokoro ni nishiki wo kazare" - clothe your mind rather than your body with brocade. The use of such materials for carpets, curtains or wall hangings, where large designs would have been applicable was practically unknown. - *Crawford - pp 9-10*

A few words perhaps should be said about those branches of art which were advanced at this period. The cult of Chanoyu not only brought prosperity to the ceremony itself but also to the various branches of the applied arts, such as bamboo work, woodwork, lacquer work and pottery.. The last mentioned especially made wonderful strides, producing

as it did tea daddies, tea bowls and other utensils indispensable to the cult. And not only these, but the textile arts also were greatly developed, for gold brocade, satin, damask, kando in stripe design, and inkin with designs printed in gold were used for bags to keep tea utensils in, and for fukusa (square pieces of silk used in Chanoyu for wiping the utensils, etc.). Especially famous were the silks, regarded as "celebrated textile fabrics" which were in great demand for the mountings of paintings and calligraphs for kakemono (hanging scrolls).

Attention may be called to Sarugaku (lit. monkey music) which hitherto existed merely as popular music. At this time it was elevated to the higher plane of Nohgaku by the genius of Kannami. Great rivalry was shown in the creation of splendid Noh dresses, giving a stimulus which led the textile art of Japan to rise to great heights of development. - ^{Somendo Akashi} ~~nypon~~ p. 36

The design of all the brocades of this period, nearly all borrowed from China, had ~~4~~ symbolical and poetical significance. The tree and flower patterns, for example, the evergreen pine and plum blossom which come early in the spring before the snow is off the ground, signified immortality and rejuvenescence.

Hideyoshi built a magnificent castle at Momoyama near Kyoto, which was lavishly decorated by the artists of the time, and Japanese art, freed from foreign influence, achieved its highest development. The art of the Momoyama period is gorgeous, characterized by a profusion of gold

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and brilliant colors. The genius of the period was Kano Yeitoku, the decorator of the Momoyama castle and painter of screens of bold design in rich colors upon a gold ground. This period and the Keicho era which immediately followed it and extended over the first decade of the Early Edo period (1603-1680) formed the Golden Age of textile art in Japan--a period of time lasting nearly twenty years.

"The term "splendour" usually employed to specify the characteristics of this period conveys no more than a general idea of the condition then existing in our country. A closer examination of the actual products of this period, however, reveals different and somewhat intricate qualities. Some of them convey exquisite taste or delicate feeling; other are characterized by elegance or refinement; while still others are possessed of that peculiar quality known in Japan as Sabi or Wabi which suggests, by its quiet refinement and subdued beauty, the tranquillity of the soul".⁷

nippon: Ahashi Somendo - p. 37.

Nishijin was the great center of art and from its looms came a great variety of beautiful textiles, Nishiki, Kinran, Shuchin, Donzu (damask), Kara Ori, Chirimen (silk crepe), Seigo (raw silk), Shusu (satin), and Ito Nishiki. (Examples of textiles fabrics that are gorgeous, pure and simple are to be found in the work of the late Edo period (1779-1867). The product of the Keicho era in a majority of cases, is characterized by a quiet splendour with depth acquired by combining gold with black, red with purple, knot dyeing with

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black monochrome painting and the like.) - ^{Nippon -} ~~Somendo~~ - p. 37

The victories of Iyeyasu resulted in his becoming Shogun in 1603 and formally established the Tokugawa Shogunate. His descendants remained the rulers of Japan for fifteen generations, maintaining the country in peace and developing the finer arts. The textile industry at Nishijin remained under the direct protection of the Tokugawa government. Kei-Sho-In, the mother of the fourth Shogun Iyetsuna, who ruled from 1651-1680), had been a weaver and when she became one of the great powers of the Tokugawa family she did much to foster the Nishijin textile industry. One one occasion, when the market for brocade was at a low ebb, she bought up the entire production to stimulate the industry.

Rivalry in luxury and dress among the Daimyos and their retainers carried the country to such extravagance that in the fifth year of the Kwanbun era(1665), the Shogun Iyetsuna limited the size of domestic brocades to eleven yards in length and eleven inches in width, just enough to make a kimono--formerly they had been double in length.

In the early Tokugawa period fashion dictated Kinran obis to be only two and a half inches wide and six feet long with the design of plum, cherry blossom and pine tree, a romantic idea derived from Hachinoki, a lyrical play, but later during the Teikyo and Genroku periods (1684-1704) wider, longer and stiffened obis became fashionable--this

of course, stimulated the weaving industry.

Chinese Nishiki ceased to be imported during the Kyoho era(1716-1735) because of the improvements made in the art of weaving in Japan since the first looms were established at Sakai, a century and a half before.

In the Bunkwa and Bunsei eras (1804-1829) Yamato Nishiki were woven for girls' obis. Many foreign influences are manifest in the Nishiki of this period. Tabuye nishiki imitated European textiles which had been brought to Japan by the Dutch, Kanton copied brocade imported from Canton, and Goburan-Ori were inspired by specimens of Gobelins tapestries.

A word should be said of the weaving technique followed during this era and even at the present day. In the Nishijin section of Kyoto many materials are produced all hand woven either on a Jacquard loom or a draw loom. In the colored brocaded silks, as many as thirty or forty colors may be used producing a material more like painting than weaving. Probably no other weavers in the world make brocaded silks using as many colors as the Japanese. These materials, as stated before, are used for obi, Kesa(priests' robes) and ceremonial robes. Making of such brocades is a long process requiring much patience and the daily output even on a Jacquard loom might be only one or two inches. "It is interesting to note a primitive method of battening which is said to be used for brocades and tapestry, and

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that is the use of the fingernails instead of a comb to push the wefts close to the warp".

According to many art critics the textile art in Japan from the time of the Meiji restoration has markedly fallen. There is found more symbolism in the patterns, and the designs follow the Kano, Tosa, Korin and Shijo schools of fine but unfortunately lack dignity in effect due to the inferiority of the designers to the artists. Contrary to this we have such statements.: "Weaving in the Meiji era received protection and encouragement from the authorities, who obtained a very satisfactory return, for there is now no town of any size where looms are not in full operation, manufacturing from silk produced from worms reared on their own mulberry trees. Both exhibitions and commercial museums at home enable the craftsmen to compare their work with that of other abroad and keep abreast of the progress of the industry". We cannot say whether the outside assistance received by the people is ~~a~~ detrimental to the art or not, but we do feel that the strong influence of the western world especially on the designs is a sorry sight--the combination of east and west in the design world has ~~proved~~ not been as successful as it might be.