

Brocades.

The history of Nishiki, ^{may} the Japanese term for Brocade, is the structure on which rests almost the whole story of Japanese weaving. According to tradition, the first examples of this technique came to Japan in 238 A.D. as a gift to the Empress Jingo from the Chinese Emperor Ming Ti. ⁽¹⁾ However, two centuries passed before the Japanese learned this method of weaving from a Korean weaver. In 463 A.D. the Emperor Yuryaku, desiring to establish a loom in Japan, sent an embassy to Korea accompanied by Kwan-in-chiri, a Korean weaver who had lived in Japan, to study the Korean methods of weaving. Kwan-in-chiri returned with the skillful Korean weaver Chong-an-na, who, at the command of the Emperor, established a brocade ~~w~~ weaver's guild at Momohara in the province of Kawachi. ⁽²⁾ Here, during his lifetime, he wove many beautiful Nishiki which were called Kara Nishiki (Korean or foreign brocade) or Kawachi Nishiki, after the province. The title Nishikibe no-muraji (family producing Nishiki) was conferred upon him.

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 was known as the Oribe-no-tsukasa. One of the most famous of the Nishiki produced by this loom during this period was Unken-nishiki (Sunset-clouds), which was copied from a specimen of Kasumi-nishiki (Valley mist) presented to the Emperor ⁽³⁾ Temmu by a Korean minister in the tenth year of Hakuho (681 A.D.)

1-Nihongi. fol. I p 231. transl. by A. Waley.

see also: Blacker; p. 206

Met. Mus. pub. Japanese Costume-p. 15

Japan Magazine. Dec. 1910 p. 489

²² 2-op. cit. pp. 349-50

³ 3-Met. Mus. publ. Japanese costume. pp. 15-16.

During the reign of Empress Genmei, ~~a~~ great impetus was given to the industry of brocade weaving as well as that of other textiles. Teachers or masters of weaving were sent out to the surrounding provinces of central Japan where raw silk of excellent quality was abundant. In this way, looms were established at twenty-two provinces. ⁽¹⁾ It was, therefore, not by chance that by the beginning of the eighth century many in the upper classes of society sat on cushions made of embroidered brocade and wore clothes of silk twill as well as rich brocades.

In 794, the capital was moved from Nara to Kyoto, then known as Heian-Jo. In the following eleven centuries Kyoto continued to be not only 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~~ 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. ⁽²⁾

The Imperial Treasury at Nara contains specimens of brocade from the earliest times, with designs designated by names and weaves. In the earlier examples, those produced before the Nara period, warp brocades are more numerous. The ground is of a delicate and minute weave, either plain or twill, while the woven designs are of a different colour or colours from that of the ground. Those brocades produced from the Nara and preceding periods are on the whole weft brocades, ~~The~~ warp brocades tending to become restricted to the manufacture of striped materials and those where the colours are arranged

1-Met. Mus. publ. Japanese Costume--~~p/9~~ p. 16

Crowdson p. 9

Tapestry Weaving-Japan Mag. 1910 vol I p. 589

(2) Met. Mus. publ. Japanese Costume p. 16.

(1)

in gradation (Ungenzaishiki).

Fierce political struggles during the eras of Shohei and Tenkei, 931-946, brought about a temporary cessation of all industries. The Oribe-no-tsukasa continued to produce Nishiki in only very small quantities, while the industry in the provinces died out. As a consequence, in the following periods there was a ~~large~~ large importation of Nishiki and other costly fabrics 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 Kara ori, silk floss was floated across the surface of a compact twill ground, usually in large showy patterns which greatly resembled embroidery, and though it was, as a rule, enriched with gilt paper strips brocaded in a separate pattern, the "float" brocading was the distinguishing mark of Kara Ori. Just when it was first produced in Japan is still a matter of controversy, some authorities say by a weaver named Tawaraya in the fifteenth century, and others, by a weaver of Hakata who wove during the early sixteenth century. (2)

In either the tenth or eleventh centuries, Kinran was brought from China by returning Japanese travelers. This was silk brocaded with gilt paper strips; if silver paper was used, the fabric was called Ginran. This type of brocade continued to come from China for several centuries, and that which was imported during the period from 1468-1488 was especially prized and later became known as Ko-Kinran (old Kinran). Among the more famous varieties of these fabrics preserved in the temples of Nara and Kyoto, some received names from

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 were arabesques of peony flowers and vines--where the design was done on a large scale and became known as O-Dzuru.

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 built at Nishi-jin, a district of Kyoto. As to the distinguishing characters of the designs of Japanese brocades of this time, ~~we~~ it must be remembered that with certain exceptions ~~and~~ such as altar cloths, priests's robes, and the costumes for Noh dances, all brocades were made for personal clothing, where, as a rule, smaller designs were preferred. The use of such materials for carpets, curtains or wall hangings, where large designs would have been applicable was practically unknown.