

The textile exchange between Japan and India During the 16th and 19th Centuries

From the viewpoint of techniques and design of traded textile by Dutch merchants

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When tracing back the connections between the textiles of Japan and India, namely their techniques and patterns, we may examine the textiles and its techniques that were brought to Japan during the time of China's Sui dynasty (581-618). At Hōryūji temple (法隆寺) in Nara, textiles that were used in Buddhist rituals in the 7th century, during which the temple was constructed, still exist to this day. As for dyeing techniques in that period, there were three main techniques so called 'san-kechi' (三纈). One of these was a clamp-resist-dyeing technique introduced from China and known as kyōkechi (夾纈) in Japan. This technique involved folding a silk textile, clamping it in between two wooden boards with carved patterns, and dyeing it in a variety of colors. But the question of exactly how these textiles were dyed remains unanswered both in China and Japan. In 1960s', wooden boards for kyōkechi dyeing have been discovered in Ahmedabad, India, revealing that the technique was transmitted from this country. Similarly, recent scholarship suggests that the warp-ikat textiles at Hōryūji temple known as kanton nishiki (広東錦) were transmitted from India to China via Central Asia, and were then introduced into Japan. All kyōkechi and ikat textiles that remain in Japan are from the Asuka (飛鳥) and Nara (奈良) periods, or the 7th and 8th centuries. After Japan ceased official relations with Tang China in 894, these techniques were never used again. They also stopped being used in China after the fall of the Tang dynasty, and therefore we may call them "true products of the Silk Road."

Unfortunately, we do not know how ikat and kyōkechi clamp-resist-dyeing techniques developed in India after this point. We do know, however, that textiles with dyed multicolor patterns, applied by hand or with woodblocks, were already being developed by the 14th century, and were being exported to the Near and Middle East. These kinds of textiles are known as sarasa (更紗) in Japan. Moreover, in the 16th century, with the beginning of the Age of Discovery, European ships began to transport Indian textiles to surrounding Asian countries as well as to Europe.

The first European country to conduct trade with Japan was Portugal. The primary goal of the Portuguese, however, was to spread Catholicism through the Society of Jesus, so they had little interest in bringing Indian textiles to Japan. Trading companies in Amsterdam of the

Netherlands first sought to make inroads into India in 1596. In 1602, they combined to form the East India Company and began to establish themselves in India while competing with Portugal. At the beginning of the 17th century, Dutch ships came to Japan and began trading for commercial purposes, which resulted in Indian textiles being brought to Japan.

A Japanese folding-screen painting at the MOA Museum of Art in Shizuoka prefecture titled, *Whose Sleeves?*, portrays many Japanese clothes hanging on the Japanese wooden hangers and one of clothes is Indian sarasa that was created for export to Indonesia. This textile is fashioned into a warrior's jacket, known as a haori (羽織) in Japanese. This kind of garment is found not only in paintings, however, as actual examples still exist today. For example, a haori jacket held by the Matsuura Historical Museum in Nagasaki is said to have been worn by Yamaga Sokō (山鹿素行 1622–1685), a military strategist of the early Edo period. As one would expect, the Indian sarasa of this jacket has patterns that were designed for use in Indonesia. The sawtooth pattern around the hems and the repetitions of roundels in the center reflect Indonesian tastes and customs. It is believed that this textile, rectangular in shape, was originally used in Indonesia as a sarong, a garment wrapped around the waist. Similar designs may also be found in a folding-screen painting at the Suntory Museum of Art titled *Amusements* and thought to be from the early Edo period, or 17th century, as well as other folding-screen paintings of genre scenes. In this way, during the early Edo period, Dutch ships brought Indian sarasa dyed with Indonesian designs to Japan, where they were fashioned into garments. It seems that garments made with Indian sarasa were adored by the Japanese, especially townspeople.

However, not all of the Indian sarasa that arrived in Japan was originally meant for export to Indonesia. The third head of the Maeda clan in Kaga domain, Maeda Toshitsune (前田利常 1594–1658), loved to collect samples of rare imported textiles. It is said that during the Kan'ei era (寛永 1624–1645) he travelled to the port city of Nagasaki because that was where textiles arrived from overseas. Included among the samples he collected are Chinese gold brocades and silk damasks, as well as Indian sarasa. These sarasa textiles, which are now in the collection of the Tokyo National Museum, are particularly brilliant as they feature floral arabesques with patterns in gold leaf. The Maeda clan fashioned these textiles into pouches for tea caddies called shifuku (仕覆) and square cloths called furoshiki (風呂敷), which were used to wrap implements for the tea ceremony. Moreover, a close look at *The Rope Curtain and a beauty* (「縄暖簾図屏風」), a folding-screen painting held by the Arc-en-Ciel Foundation, reveals that the woman depicted is wearing an undergarment made from Indian sarasa. Likewise, in *Beauty with a Clock on a Pillar* (「柱時計美人図」), a painting by Nishikawa Sukenobu (西川祐信) at the Tokyo National Museum, the subject wears a sash made from this kind of textile.

The Dutch, being savvy merchants, knew that shipping Indian sarasa to Japan would result in great profits. In the 1630s they set up trading posts where the Portuguese had yet to establish themselves, such as the Coromandel Coast, Surat, which was the main port of Gujarat, and

Bengal. These areas were also the main producers of brocades. 1606 was the year in which a trading post was established in Petapoeli, located about 50 kilometers southwest of Machilipatnam. Around this time, the Dutch were already having artisans of hand-painted sarasa in Petapoeli making sarasa designed for export to other places in Asian such as Siam, Indonesia, and Japan. In documents sent to the Dutch trading post in Petapoeli between the 1st day of the fifth month of 1608 until the 24th day of the third month of 1610, the following phrases occur with great frequency: “Sarassa chere Siam,” or “sarasa for Siam,” “Maleise Javanse sarassas,” or “sarasa for Malaysia and Java,” and “Sarassas Japonij,” or “sarasa for Japan.” There are also records from this time of “de patsjeri sarassa’s Japonij,” or “extra-long sarasa textiles for Japan,” being shipped from the trading post at Petapoeli. This kind of sarasa, designed for export to Japan, may be found in a collection commonly referred to as the “Hikone sarasa (「彦根更紗」).” This collection comprises 500 sarasa samples acquired by the head of the Ii clan (井伊家), lord of Hikone domain. Textiles with a rich variety of traditional Japanese patterns dyed by Indian artisans were shipped to Japan. These patterns were called the following:

fans, called ‘ogi-de’ 扇手

assorted crests, called ‘monzukushi-de’ 紋尽手

squirrels, called ‘risu-de’ 栗鼠手

Chinese lions, called ‘shishi-de’ 獅子手

red-billed blue magpies, called ‘sanjaku-de’ 山鵲手

flower shapes like a melon in round slices, called ‘mokko-de’ 木瓜手

chrysanthemums, called ‘kiku-de’ 菊手

strawberries, called ‘ichigo-de’ 苺手

tomoe three-comma shapes, called ‘tomoe-de’ 巴手

floral lozenges, called ‘hanabishi-de’ 花菱手

incense pouches, called ‘ko-de’ 香手 or pillows, called ‘makura-de’ 枕手

fishing nets, called ‘ami-de’ 網手

trapezoids, called ‘hakamagoshi-de’ 袴腰手

stylized tortoiseshells, called ‘kikko-de’ 亀甲手, etc.

In addition, sarasa made for export to Europe as well as sarasa made for religious use in India was also shipped to Japan. The Japanese adored these textiles as well, which featured patterns with two-headed birds (called ‘hiyoku-de’ 比翼手), pomegranates (called ‘zakuro-de’ 柘榴手), large stylized flowers (called ‘karahana-de’ 唐花手), and they were under impression that ‘sacred hearts’ were symbolic solders with a shield and spiers, so called ‘ganka-de’ (ガンカ手).

Because of the popularity of Indian sarasa in domestic markets, Japanese artisans began attempting to create imitations of these textiles. For a long time, the Japanese believed that

sarasa made in India was actually from Siam, or present-day Thailand. For this reason, they called the sarasa they produced in imitation of Indian sarasa, “shamuro zome,” which literally means “Siam dyeing.”

The first textual source where we can find the term “Siam dyeing” is Kefuki gusa (毛吹草) by the 17th-century-poet Matsue Shigeyori (松江重頼 1602–1680). In this text, written in either 1646 or 1672, textiles made with Siam dyeing are mentioned as one of the famous products of Yamashiro province, or present-day Kyoto prefecture. In Yōshū fushi (雍州府志), a book about Yamashiro written from 1682 to 1686 by the doctor and historian Kurokawa Doyu (黒川道祐 1623-1691), textiles made with “Siam dyeing” and “sarasa dyeing” are also listed as famous products of this province. Moreover, Shinpan tōfū onhiinagata(『新板当風御ひいなかた』), a book of designs for Japanese kosode (小袖 kimono-shaped garments) published in 1684, mentions “Siam-dyed” textiles as novel and popular at the time. It reveals that the Siam dyeing of Yamashiro province was a popular technique for dyeing kimono.

So it seems that Siam dyeing was practiced in Japan in the early Edo period, around the mid-17th century, but what exactly was it? Wakan sansai zue (『和漢三才図会』), an encyclopedia compiled by Terashima Ryōan(寺島良安) and published in 1712, notes in “Chapter 27:Silk Fabric and Costumes,” that the sarasa fabrics produced in great quantities in Japan lose their patterns after only one washing. Moreover, the Edo poet Kikuoka Senryō (菊岡沾涼 1680-1747) in his Honchō seji danki (『本朝世事談綺』), a book about the origins of various things published in 1734, notes that textiles “dyed in Japan lose their colors” when talking about “Siam dyeing.” These sources reveal that unlike in India, techniques for fixing the dyes did not exist in Japan.

In 1820, during the late Edo period, the import of Indian sarasa ceased while the import of European sarasa began to thrive. Around this time, Nabeshima, Kyoto, Sakai, and other areas in Japan began producing so-called “Japanese sarasa (和更紗),” which imitated Indian sarasa yet differed from it through the combined use of paper stencils and small woodblocks for the dyeing. It was also different from the Siam dyeing of the mid-Edo period as the textiles could be washed without losing their colors. I wish to emphasize that this “Japanese sarasa” was completely different from “Siam dyeing” that Yamashiro province was famous for until the mid-Edo period.

We do not know exactly what “Siam dyeing” was, but in any case, because textiles dyed with this technique lost their colors when washed, we can imagine that they were not treated as particularly valuable items in Japan. Today, there are no extant items called “Siam-dyed textiles.” However, there are some very interesting items worth mentioning among the Japanese textiles exported to the Netherlands.

The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam holds “Japone rokken,” which are thought to have been brought to the Netherlands from Japan in the 17th century. These are gowns tailored like kimono that were beloved by Dutch aristocrats as indoor clothing like gowns. Among the Japone rokken at the Rijksmuseum is one made of silk and dyed with a Japanese pattern using stencils. The motifs of this pattern are rice cakes wrapped in bamboo leaves. A detailed examination of the coloring technique revealed that multiple paper stencils were used and that non-water-soluble pigments were rubbed into the fabric. Because the pattern was created by rubbing the pigments into the fabric, we may assume that washing the fabric would cause the pigments to come right off.

Because this garment is tailored in a Japanese style, clearly it was made in Japan. This is nothing more than my guess, but perhaps using paper stencils and rubbing the pigments into the cloth is what was referred to as “Siam dyeing” in Japan. Japone rokken were also made with a variety of Japanese silks, or with European silks. For example, a Japone rokken in the collection of Gemeentemuseum Den Haag was designed with Japanese auspicious motifs in the early yuzen dyeing (yuzen-zome 友禅染). Or another example at the Rijksmuseum is made of European damask. They were brought to other European countries as well, and in England, for example, were called “banyan.” In the 18th century, the English began having banyan produced in India with local sarasa-dyeing techniques. This is an unusual example of how the shapes of Japanese garments were introduced into India in a roundabout way.

Next we consider about Indian ikat and its influence on Japan. An exceedingly beautiful kind of ikat called “patola” is produced in Patan in northwest India. This is a double-ikat textile, meaning that both the warp and weft threads are dyed with a variety of colors before they are woven to form a patterned fabric. This is an extremely elaborate process for silk weave, with extant examples dating back to the 18th and 19th centuries. Patola was also brought to the island of Sumatra in Indonesia, where the local royalty came to adore clothing made from this textile. Later, textiles were produced locally in imitation of imported patola, although these were in weft ikat rather than double ikat, which resulted in blurry patterns. Multicolor double ikat is unique to India.

In the 16th century, double-ikat textiles of cotton threads dyed only with indigo were produced on the southeast coast of India. These textiles were shipped to Japan among other places. Sumatra also produces a double-ikat cotton textile with a single color. Double-ikat textiles known as Kurume ikat are also produced in Fukuoka in southern Japan. The weft threads are dyed with Japanese indigo. Supposedly, these textiles were first produced in the Genroku era (元禄 1688–1704), although production did not thrive until the second half of the 18th century. Because ikat did not exist in Japan until the creation of Kurume ikat (久留米絣), I think it is natural to assume that this technique was introduced from India to Sumatra and then entered

Japan via the Ryūkyū islands (琉球諸島). The ikat technique then spread throughout Japan, and ikat textiles of ramie or silk threads were produced.

Lastly, I'd like to have a topic about tie-dyeing. Japan has a fine tie-dyeing technique similar to Bandhani. However, because this technique was practiced in Japan since long ago and passed down through the generations without interruption, it is difficult to connect it to India. Japan also has a stitch-resist dyeing so-called 'Tsuji-gahana'. It's stitch-resist-dyed textile made in Japan, from Muromachi period to the early Edo period (from 15th century to the early 17th century). Now I'll show you how to dye 'tsuji-gahana' stitch-resist dyeing made from Muromachi period to the early Edo period. During that time, tsuji-gahana was a summer outer garment without line, but now only fragments of tsuji-gahana garments are remained. But those antique textile fragments are very popular in Japan, because its beauty and fineness. So I introduce how to make Japanese stitch resist dyeing as follows.

- ① First, drawing the design on plain weave silk with flower juice of Aobana(青花) or Tsuyukusa(露草) usually dayflower or wandering, scientific name is commelina communis) . Aobana is completely faded when washed.
- ② Sawing along the design with ramie thread. We call this process 'Itoire' (糸入れ). As long as I researched all the fragments of tsuji-gahana made from Muromachi period to Momoyama period, ramie thread was used for stitching. Because we Japanese didn't have the skill of growing cotton, so imported cotton thread was very expensive. And, ramie thread resists tightly into water or liquid dye.
- ③ Pulling the threads tightly and gathering up the fabric. Then many projections are formed from the fabric. Those projections are wrapped with plastic ribbons and coiled with thread. In Muromachi period, bamboo barks or leaves were used instead of plastic ribbons. (cf. "Nippo jisyo (『日葡辞書』, Portuguese-Japanese Dictionary)" .
- ④ After dyeing, we remove threads and plastic ribbons. We'll find stitch-resist dyed pattern on the fabric.
- ⑤ Washing with water and pressing the wrinkles out. After that, the hand drawing patterns are added on the fabric, with black ink. Its lines are very thin. Gradation of black ink and patterns of worm-eaten leaf characterize tsuji-gahana.

Japanese dyeing techniques are much influenced in India, but I don't know that kind of stitch-resist dyeing are made in India. Did that stitch-resist dyeing also originate from India, or other Asian countries?

I hope that various researches of textile between India and Japan will see progress through deeper understanding of dyeing history in Asia.