

A traditional Japanese textile workshop, likely a dye house. The room features dark wooden walls and a floor made of numerous wooden racks. In the foreground, several large, shallow wooden vats are filled with a dark liquid, likely dye. In the background, several large, light-colored sacks are stacked on a raised platform. The scene is dimly lit, with light coming from windows on the right side.

# Kimono Textile Techniques

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# Introduction

Throughout the centuries kimono and yukata have remained firmly in place as one of the most iconic pieces of Japanese visual culture. Rather than focusing on the development of fashion or wearing of kimono however the question here is how are these beautiful garments made? The tradition of hand making and dyeing kimono is a dying art form of which many of the few remaining masters are ageing and unfortunately expected to pass within the next decade with no one in line to pass down their craft. Within the art of just the dyeing kimono there are dozens of techniques and it can take up to 40 years just to master one.

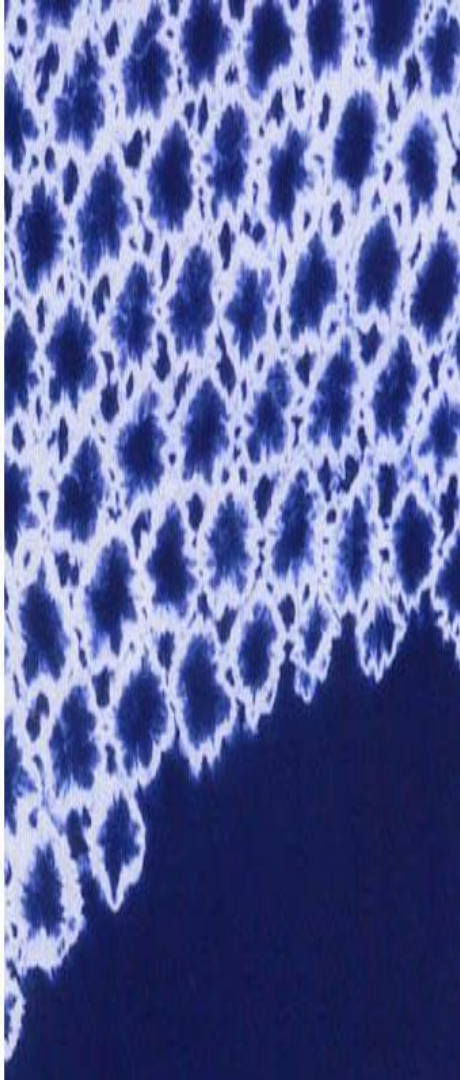


# Shibori

Shibori is one of the oldest known fabric dyeing techniques and is often correlated in the west to the “tie-dye” method. The shibori method is done by repeated binding or stitching, then folding, winding and compressing the fabric before dyeing and revealing the unique patterns by releasing the pressure from the compression. Within just the shibori branch there are plethora of differing methods meant to bring out the desired effects and designs which separates it from western tie-dye.

The image to the left is kinoko shibori, made by hand tying each individual knot and then released one by one after dyeing to create not only the pattern but the unique texture to the cloth as well.





# Miura Shibori

Another method of shibori dyeing is miura shibori. This is also termed as “looped binding.” Miura shibori utilizes a hooked needle to pluck up small portions of the cloth and then in accordance to its namesake loops a thread around the fabric two times. No knots are used in this technique and only the tension of the thread is what holds it together. Due to lack of knots however the process of binding and unbinding is much easier. Making Miura Shibori a very popular form of hand dyeing.

The tightness of the winded cloth determines the pattern which makes every design especially unique.



# Kumo Shibori

An third method of shibori is kumo shibori, distinctive for its web-like shapes in its pattern. Purposeful folding or pleating of the fabric by delicately and evenly tying portions achieves these concentrated designs exemplified to the left. This compared to its counter parts requires a very meticulous technique.

There are numerous remaining branches of the shibori technique, so many in fact that Yoshiko Wada has written an entire book on just Shibori that is seen as the most comprehensive piece of english work on the subject. However it is just the tip of the iceberg concerning the art of kimono dyeing.



# Yuzen

The Yuzen technique first started in the 17th century and traditionally Yuzen dyed kimono are known to be some of the most expensive to buy due to the intricacy and time-consuming nature of the process. Yuzen is done first by making a natural paste usually out of rice or soybeans and then outlining patterns free-hand onto the cloth where the dye is also painted in by hand. Even the wide expanses of the backdrops are painstakingly painted in by hand. For repeated designs over larger areas, however, stencils or squeegees can be used to apply the paste, then after the paste has dried and the dye has been applied to a complete painting, the kimono will be steamed to set the dye and the paste is washed away.

The delicate gradient shading in the colors are the most distinct feature that can be accomplished by this technique, which can be seen in the flowers in the image on the top right.





# Katazome

Katazome is the technique of stencil dyeing and while compared to yuzen may appear underwhelming, it holds an intricacy all its own. Each stencil is handcrafted using a piece of hand-made mulberry paper called shibugami. This paper is made waterproof through a process of soaking it in persimmon tannin.

A rice paste that flexible when dried is then put into the holes of the stencil in order to purposefully block our portions of the fabric from being dyed. The cloth is then submerged in dye and the rice paste is washed away revealing the pattern. These patterns can also be applied by hand for larger pieces but this is known as a separate technique called *tsutsugaki* can are for designs that are only used once. Traditional Katazome patterns usually share motifs of nature such as flowers or the birds exemplified in the upper left image to the side.





# Surihaku

In addition to these plentiful and complex methods of dyeing colors, gold or silver metallic foil can also be applied to the designs creating a luxurious effect to the fabric. This can be done by first applying a rice paste, either by hand or stenciled, and then pressing the gold leaf into the rice paste while it is already partially dried. This technique is often linked with its past where it was commonly used in the making of the dramatic costumes used in traditional Noh theatre. In modern times it can still be seen in use on traditional *uchikake* wedding kimono.

There are other techniques that achieve similar effects including but not limited to Sunako, where the gold dust is scattered using bamboo, Kindeigaki where it is applied with a brush and lastly In Kindami(gold stamping) which is showed in the bottom image to the left.





# Sashiko

Sashiko is the technique of creating the patterns designs through hand stitching one at a time and is considered a form of embroidery. A secondary purpose of Sashiko was to reinforce the fabric to make it sturdier for the wearer. It is also an intricate part in the creation Boro which is the continuous mending or patching of garments over time and passing them down the generational line. However sashiko developed further past the Boro into more complex and intricate designs.



# Ai-zome

Ai-zome is a process of creating indigo dye that originated in Japan it can take up to three hundred days spanning from planting stage to the actual creation of the dye. While not specific to the use of kimono fabrics it is still intrinsically tied to the process, history and culture of the craft.

Ai-Zome is known as being exceptionally dark compared to other indigo dyes. The fabric is submerged into the dye and soaked over twenty times over the course of several weeks to bring out the especially rich color that is renown for.







# Kasuri

This brings forward the final method, Kasuri, which is a technique that uses thread which is selectively and meticulously dyed before the weaving process even begins. For this the threads are stretched out on a frame and bound in the areas that are chosen for the design, the bound coils of thread are then dunked in dye pots and once the dye has set are woven together.

The origin of the word Kasuri comes from the Japanese verb to blur which denotes the tendency of Kasuri patterns to appear slashed or blurred, such as in the images on the bottom left. By using this method of dyeing the individual threads before weaving instead painting or printing one such as many of the previously mentioned techniques the designs are able to be seen on both sides of the fabric when it is done.



# Conclusion

This doesn't cover even close to all of the techniques and processes that are apart of the making of kimono, of which there are over a thousand, but what hopefully it does accomplish is to demonstrate the skill and passion behind the beautiful garments and in the traditions that have been passed over the hundreds of years of their making.

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