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Weaving Cloth from *Tosa-washi* (Japanese Paper from Kochi in Shikoku, Japan):
Connection and Expansion of Area and People

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Preface

Tosa-washi (Japanese paper from Kochi Prefecture in Shikoku, Japan) has been made in Kochi since the tenth century and *Tosa-washi* which was the first product of *Tosa* region was supplied to the *Edo* shogunate in the *Edo* period of the seventeenth century. The manufacture of *Tosa-washi* has been placed on the traditional industry of Kochi until now. It was specified in *The Traditional Craftwork* of the country in 1976, and specified in *The Important Intangible Cultural Asset* of the country in 2001. This study focuses on the creative activities of two craftswomen who weave *washi*-textile called *shifu* using *Tosa-washi*, and I examine the socio-cultural meaning of woven cloth.



Figure 1. Mulberry (*Broussonetia Kazinoki*×*B.papyrifera*).

Shifu made of mulberry (*Broussonetia kazinoki* × *B.papyrifera*) paper also had been woven in Kochi very much until the beginning of the twentieth century (Fig.1.) Shifu means recycle of paper which became unnecessary after the characters were written to the threads. Because the clothes made of shifu are warmer than the clothes made of cotton, shifu were used for the substitution of cotton. Though the manufacture of shifu stopped in the post-World War Second era, there are craftswomen who weave shifu at present. This study takes up the creating activities of two craftswomen, *Mei Kusakawa* (1930-) and *Yuko Isozaki* (1978-) of different generations (Fig. 2.)



Figure 2. Washi-textile, shifu (left) and washi-cloth (right)

The methods of the research are as follows. First, I examined the history of Tosa-washi from the literature and museum materials of *Japanese Paper Museum Ino Town*, Kochi. Second, I have made field survey on the manufacture of Tosa-washi since 2005 in Ino Town, then I interviewed with the two craftswomen who make washi by hand and weave shifu about the character of their creation. The third, I made field survey at *Tosa Cooperative House* for handicapped children in 2007 and 2008, and at *Houay Hong Vocational Training Center for Women* in Vientiane, Laos in 2008 in order to examine the activities of a craftswoman. Shifu has been worn as clothes by changing the nature into cloth from paper. Then what kinds of socio-cultural meanings does shifu have in the modern Japanese society? I examine the meanings of the creation of two craftswomen.

The history of Tosa-washi, washi-cloth and washi-textile ‘shifu’

1. The history of Tosa-washi

It is clear that washi was already made in the wide range of *Tosa* in the tenth century, because according to the historical description “*Engishiki*”, Tosa-washi was used as the tax ‘*Chou*’ in 927 of a period of the rule of *Daigo* Emperor [Kouno 1992:41]. In the Edo period, *Kazutoyo Yamanouchi* who was the feudal lord of *Tosa* region started to supply Tosa-washi to the Edo shogunate as a tax [Kouno 1992:46-47]. At that time, many washi craftsmen lived in Ino and washi was carried by the ships which passed the Niyodo River through the wholesale store to the castle town in *Tosa*.

Genta Yoshii who promoted industrialization of Tosa-washi was born in the house of the paper craftsman in Ino in 1826 at the end of the Edo period. He improved the tools which filter the fibers of washi and he promoted the production of washi dramatically [Kouno 1992:60-61]. After that, because the manufacture of washi has been improved following *Yoshii*’s improvement, washi production became an important industry of Kochi at the end of the nineteenth century. Washi manufacture became to the first industry of Kochi Prefecture when the first *Kochi Industrial Exhibition* was held in 1882 [Kouno 1992:65-68].

Though there was not so much hand-made washi as machine-made washi, hand-made washi has been made in Ino until the beginning of the twentieth century and after the World War Second. Tosa-washi was specified in *The Traditional Craftwork* of the country in 1976, and *Tosa Tengu Jyoshi* (hand-made washi for sliding door and screen made by Tosa-washi) was specified in *The Important Intangible Cultural Asset* of the country in 2001. Tosa-washi has been shipped as an artwork not only to the outside of the prefecture but also abroad.

2. The history of washi-clothes ‘shii’ and washi-textile ‘shifu’

Washi has been worn as clothes by the monks in Japan. Then washi-clothes called ‘shii’ spread as the people’s clothes at the end of the Edo period, and the function of washi-cloth was protection from cold. Washi-cloth became to be produced in washi producing districts. *Genta Yoshii* wrote that *shii* had been worn in *Tosa* in the times of Edo in his book “*A Japanese Paper Manufacture Argument*” in 1831.

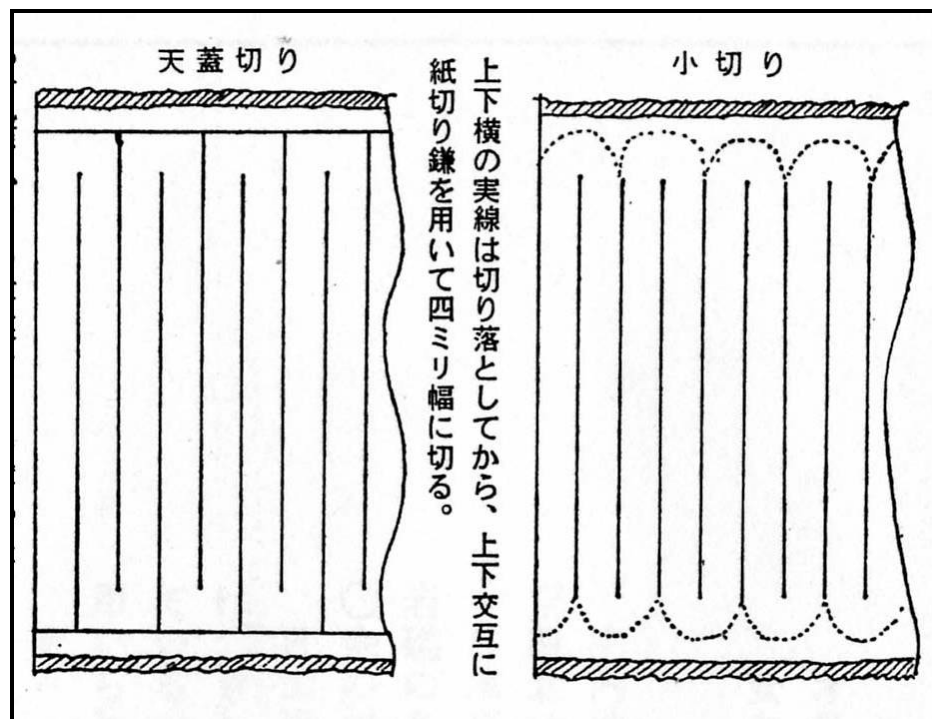


Figure 3. Two ways of how to cut washi (left: *tengaigiri*, right: *kogiri*)[Sumida 1980:36].

As washi-cloth is lighter than silk, cotton, wool and hemp, and absorbs sweat, and it is washable and soft, it has been used as materials for kimono. There are two kinds of shifu. One is woven by washi-thread as weft thread, and cotton or silk thread as warp thread. Another is woven by washi-thread only which is called ‘*moroshifu*’. There are two methods for making washi-thread, one is ‘*tengaigiri*’ which is the method of cutting washi alternately, and another is ‘*kogiri*’ which is the method of cutting washi from one side. As *tengaigiri* should be necessary of high technique to cut, *kogiri* has been popular (Fig. 3.)



Figure 4. The hat made from shifu in the Taisho period (Kochi Prefectural Paper Technology Center Ino Town)

Washi manufacture and weaving shifu have been done in Ino and the hats and the bags were made in the former half of the twentieth century (Fig. 4.) Nowadays, shifu has been used for kimono and *obi* for special occasions and seldom used in daily life.

The methods of making shifu

The methods of how to make shifu including making washi from mulberry is as follows.



Figure 5 (left). Peeling the outer skin of mulberry. **Figure 6 (right).** Boiling mulberry

1. The methods of making washi from mulberry

- (1) The branches of mulberry are cropped and steamed in a big pail then the barks are peeled off (Fig. 5.)
- (2) The barks peeled off are put in the water and the dusts are taken off.
- (3) After the peeled skin of mulberry is boiled with hot water containing alkaline medicine for two or three hours, it is washed with cold water (Fig. 6.)
- (4) Dust which is left to the skin is taken off more.
- (5) The skin is struck with mallet, then the fiber is smashed delicately.

(6) The mucus of the root stem of plant ‘tororoaoi’ (*Abelmoschus manihot*) is added to the water of mulberry fiber (Fig.7.) At this time, dye stuff such as red pigment ‘bengara’ (*Red Iron Oxide*) and such as plant dye ‘yamamomo’ (*Myrica rubra*) is added.

(7) The stuff of washi is filtered, then piled up on the base, squeezed and dehydrated.(Fig. 8 and Fig. 9.)

(8) Each piece of washi is taken off, and it is dried on the flat board.



Figure 7 (left). The root stem of tororoaoi (Abelmoschus manihot).

Figure 8 (center). Filtering mulberry fiber.

Figure 9 (right). Filtered stuff of washi on the board.

2. The methods of making *moroshifu*

(1) Each piece of washi is folded and cut with a cutter.

(2) Cut washi is rubbed on the stone. Then the end of washi is cut and the thread is spun with a spinning wheel (fig.10.)

(3) The warp thread is wound around the frame to be measured the length of the thread.

(4) The warp thread is set to the hand loom and the textile is woven by supplying the weft thread.



Figure 10. Washi thread making.

The cases of creation by the modern craftswomen

Then we consider two cases of creative activities of two craftswomen, Yuko Isozaki of the younger generation and Mei Kusakawa of the senior generation.

Yuko Isozaki (1978-)

Ms. Isozaki from Kochi City was trained of washi-making in the washi manufacturing company and *Kochi Prefectural Paper Technology Center* in Ino Town when she was twenty-three years old after she graduated the university. She has been studying how to weave shifu under Ms. Kusakawa since when she was twenty-four years old. She has been making threads from washi which she made, dyeing from the plant dye stuffs which are cropped in Kochi and weaving by hand loom.

Ms. Isozaki sticks to the material of washi and she specially uses a kind of mulberry ‘*akaso*’ (*B.tricuspis*) which has a few twigs and whose fiber is thin, and which is more suitable for washi because she thinks akaso the characteristic material of Kochi. And one more characteristic of her creation is to make cloth dying with plants in Kochi such as *yamamomo* and the pigments such as *bengara* and *sumi* (Japanese black ink) which there have been from old times.



Figure 11. Clothes designed by Isozaki.

The items of her making are kimono, *obi*, dress, jackets and life articles such as hat and corsage (Fig.11.) She presented her works of washi and shifu at the exhibition “*The 30th Forum of Young Craftsmen of Hand-made Washi*” in Tokyo in 2005. She also presents kimono and life articles at the exhibition in Kochi every year in February.

She also makes survey about washi-cloth and shifu of old times, and she tries new creation considering the history of how to make shifu, the kinds of life articles and clothes which were made from washi of old times. Ms. Isozaki develops her creation from washi to washi-cloth with materials and colors which involves *Kochi-ness*. Furthermore she creates the life articles of natural and simple style.

She learned about computer engineering at university in Tokyo, and worked at the company of Information Technology after graduation. She was so busy at the time of university student and office lady that she remembered her life of past and nature of her home town in Kochi, and she thinks her memory of home town supported her life in Tokyo. Then she became to adore her home town and her friends, so she went back to Kochi. Her family and her friends accepted her warmly, then she became to want to make washi which she had ever watched how to make. At first, everyone surprised to know her thought and opposed because they thought making washi is very heavy work for women. But Ms. Isozaki decided her mind to learn how to make washi at washi manufacturing company and *Kochi Prefectural Paper Technology Center* in Ino Town, and she mastered the technique of making washi by hand. She also learned how to do natural-dye and how to weave shifu, and she has been creating and presenting her works that she interpreted *Kochi-ness*, tradition and nature individually. It is interpreted that she integrated her sense which she got from the past life experience in Kochi and Tokyo, and she could established herself by presenting her works in the exhibitions in Kochi of her home town and Tokyo where she had lived.

Ms. Mei Kusakawa (1930-)

Ms. Mei Kusakawa started to weave to revive mulberry textile '*tafu*' which had been woven in Kochi since old times. She asked the elderly person but she was said that weaving *tafu* is very heavy work. When she tried to make threads from mulberry branch barks, she found that the work was very hard, so she became to think to use the mulberry washi.

Ms. Kusakawa has been producing textiles for kimono mainly. She makes very fine threads and she weaves shifu using cotton or silk threads for weft thread and she expresses a light delicate color tone dying with plants.

She had an opportunity to go to Laos in the Southeast Asia to teach weave and dye there in 1996. She supported to establish *Houay Hong Vocational Training Center for Women* in the suburbs of Vientiane in 1998 as a work of *JICA* (*Japan International Cooperation Agency*) and she has continued her volunteer work after the work of *JICA* until now.



Figure 12. (Left) A trainee weaving shifu at Houay Hong Vocational Training Center.



Figure 13. (Right) The exhibition of shifu by the trainees of Tosa Cooperative House.

Her work in Laos means that traditional textiles which were lost by the civil war in Laos has been revived by hand-made paper, and she has supported Laotian women and handicapped women to learn the technique and she helps that textiles may become the means of women's living. Hand-made mulberry paper has been existed in Laos since old times, and the inspiration of weaving textiles from mulberry paper is original by Ms. Kusakawa (Fig.12.) Then she attempts revival of weavings of minority ethnic groups which have been lost. There were fourteen women who wanted to study how to weave and dye from various villages at *Houay Hong Vocational Training Center for Women* in Vientiane in March, 2008. From the interview, I could hear that they have their aims to become a good weaver of textile and to become a trainer of weaving and natural dyeing in their villages after their graduation of the center.

Ms. Kusakawa also has been introducing the works of the center to Japan. She organized the exhibition of Laotians' textiles and her own works at *Makino Botanical Garden* in Kochi City, and she presented the color richness of natural dye and simplicity of shifu there in 2001. She has been continuing her activities to present at the exhibition, for example in Kochi in August 2006. At the exhibition in Yokohama in June 2008, she introduced the works of herself and Laotians women's works to Japan. She talks that her teaching activity in Laos helps her to expand her imagination of weaving and dyeing, and the creation of her works.

Ms. Kusakawa also has the class which she teaches how to spin the threads and how to weave, and she promotes handicapped children with their rehabilitation at *Tosa Cooperative House* in Tosa City, Kochi. The handicapped children learn how to cut washi and spin the threads, and weave the textiles. They also learn how to dye by plants such as '*kusagi*' (*Clerodendrum trichotomum*) which grows in Kochi. Spinning

threads and weaving need the move of hands and fingers and they promote rehabilitation. Such routine works which are repeated everyday suggest handicapped children who learn and work mental stability and a feeling of the achievement (Fig.13.)

The bags and the clothes are made from shifu by the handicapped children as souvenir things and life articles for the monks and the pilgrims who visit *Kiyotaki Temple* which is one of the eighty-eight temples for traveling around in Shikoku. Those activities help handicapped children with their independence.

The common characteristic of the activities of two craftswomen is that traditional culture of Kochi is situated on the basis of their creation. The young craftswoman gives an individual idea on the method of weaving and items which she creates. On the other hand, the senior craftswoman helps others to make textiles and their independence placing the textiles for kimono as basis of her creation. In other words, two craftswomen preserve and reconstruct traditional culture of Kochi by shifu making, and they have suggested individual's, women's and handicapped person's independence by creating based on tradition.

Socio-cultural meaning of washi-cloth and washi-textile shifu

Washi has been used as a material on which sutra or the characters were written in Japan. Furthermore, washi became to be used as clothes and textiles. Cutting washi, spinning as threads and weaving it mean to transform paper to cloth. Such transformation from paper to cloth meant supply of precious clothes for the people.

From the activities of the modern craftswomen, transformation from paper to cloth means to product clothes and life articles, and also it has other meanings. The two craftswomen place *Kochi-ness* on the basis of their creation. By dyeing with plants and pigments which are in Kochi, they present simplicity and nature relating locality. They create their individual works adding modernity and creation, and they present designs which meet modern life styles. Furthermore they expand their activities from themselves to others, and they suggest themselves and others' independence. The two craftswomen have a role to connect areas and individuals who live there, by expanding their activities, and recognizing their own regional and traditional culture and communicating with other cultures through making textiles.

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