The Global Influence of China and Europe on Local Japanese Tapestries Mainly from the 19th through Early 20th Centuries

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Introduction
In this paper, ongoing research on important Japanese tapestries mainly from the 19th century through the first half of the 20th century and on comparative Chinese and European tapestries that served as models for the Japanese weavers to imitate is presented. Although the term tapestry can have many different meanings, here the term tapestry is used specifically for the technique and the fabric woven by this technique as follows: use of discontinuous wefts which turn along the edges of the color fields to produce patterns and images.¹

A review of the history of tapestries remaining in Japan showed that it is not clear when tapestries started to be woven in Japan. To the best of the author’s knowledge, the tapestry fragments remaining in the Hōryūji temple and Shōsōin in Nara are the oldest specimens available. These are presumably the 7-8th century productions; however, it is not clear whether these were produced in China or Japan.² In addition to these fragments, a huge Buddhist mandala tapestry remains in the Taima-dera temple in Nara. This tapestry is assumed to be a Chinese 8th century production.³ These pieces are the oldest group of tapestries handed down in Japan, and further research is required to verify their production countries.

It is difficult to find any indication that tapestries were woven in Japan during the middle ages. It was not until the late 18th century, in the late Edo Period, that evidence confirming the existence of tapestry production in Japan could be found. By examining the remaining pieces, it can be determined that the foundation of the Japanese tapestries was based on foreign influences from the end of the 18th century through the first half of the 20th century. And from such bases, the Japanese weavers then gradually developed their own expressions.

³ Ōta Eizō also stated that it is not definite that these pieces are Japanese productions. See Eizō Ōta, “Tsuzureori taima mandara ni tsuite,” in Ōta Eizō senshokushi chosaku shū, Vol.1, (Tokyo: Bunka shuppan kyoku, 1986 [1986-a]) 306.
³ Ōta presumed that Taima mandala was produced in China. See Ibid., 306-307.
Kitazawa presumed that this piece was produced either in China or Japan in the 8th century. See Nara kokuritsu hakubutsukan ed., Itō no mihotoke (Nara: Nara kokuritsu hakubutsukan, 2018) 255-256.
In this paper, the Japanese copies and foreign originals will be compared in order to consider how the Japanese assimilated foreign influences for forming the foundations of their tapestry weaving. Then, three developmental stages of the Japanese tapestries from the 19th century through the first half of the 20th century will be discussed. The reader should then be able to see how Chinese and European tapestries influenced the formation of the Japanese tapestries, and how the Japanese tried to attain their own expressions through these tapestries.

The Chinese tapestries and the Japanese copies
Several Chinese tapestries were brought to Japan, altered into hangings, and consequently used as decorations on floats in the Gion festival in Kyoto and other festivals in the vicinity of Kyoto. Several tapestries handed down in the Gion festival indicate that the Japanese copies of the Chinese tapestries were produced no later than the end of the 18th century.

To the best of the author's knowledge, the earliest datable Japanese copy of the Chinese tapestry was produced in 1798 for the Hōshō-yama float. Since this tapestry is quite large (203cm in height by 159cm in width) and the pattern quite intricate, it is obvious that Japanese tapestry weaving was already fully developed at this time. Therefore, it can be inferred that the Japanese began to produce tapestries earlier than 1798, possibly in the last half of the 18th century.

The comparison of the Japanese copies and the Chinese originals used in the Gion festival is important, as it will clarify the earliest stage of the Japanese tapestry production. Although some discussions are available, detailed research has not been completed, because it is difficult to distinguish the Japanese copies from the Chinese originals. In order to solve this problem, this author employed one primary source: the Zoho gione saiki [Detailed record of the Gion festival with additional information] (referred to as Zoho hereafter). This document was written by Fujita Sadahide in 1814, and its preface includes:

一 山鉾錺附之部に水引・見送・前掛等に地織と記せしハ、近世京師二面織出す處の縦縦織なり

The term “Jiori” (local weaving) is described under the items of hangings that are narrow, large back, front, etc. in the section on float decorations, and these “Jiori” are tapestries recently woven in Kyoto.

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4 Lining of this tapestry includes woven inscriptions, including the year 1798. See Gion matsuri yamaboko rengōkai, Gion matsuri yamaboko kensōhin chōsa hōkokusho: kokunai senshokuhin no bu (Kyoto: Gion matsuri yamaboko rengōkai, 2014) 50.
5 Ōta presumed that some tapestries are Japanese productions. However, the pieces with reliable evidence are few. See Eizō Ōta, “Yamaboko kenso no hensen,” in Ōta Eizō senshokushi chosaku shū, Vol.2, (Tokyo: Bunka shuppan kyoku, 1986 [1986-b]) 169-250.
6 Sadahide Fujita, Zōho gione saiki (1814), Preface, no page.
Thus, we know that the tapestries described as “Jiori” in this document are Japanese productions.

The following was found in the section on the Kuronushi-yama float:

Outer back hangings\(^7\): are of two kinds; each one is alternately used every other year. Both are Chinese tapestries: one is a design of flowers and birds on a blue background; the other is a design of 100-children on a red background.

This description points out that one of the outer back hangings in the Kuronushi-yama float is the Chinese tapestry of 100-children on a red background. And, fortunately, the tapestry with the same features still remains in this Kuronushi-yama district (Illust. 1). Hence, it can be inferred that this piece is the Chinese production. The author assumes that the production period of the Kuronushi-yama piece is around the end of the Ming dynasty, probably in the first half of the 17th century.\(^8\) The inscription on the lining of the Kuronushi-yama piece shows that it was used in Kyoto in 1700\(^9\), indicating the piece was brought to Japan in the 17th century.

\(^7\) There are two kinds of back hangings in the Gion festival. One is “Miokuri”, and the other is “Ushirogake”. In this paper, “Miokuri” is translated into outer back hanging, and “Ushirogake” into back hanging.

\(^8\) There is no clue for specifying the production period of this piece. However, Prof. Huang and Ms. Chen stated that a quite similar 100-children tapestry handed down in China was assumed to be an end of the Ming dynasty production. See Neng-fu Huang and Juan-juan Chen, Zhongguo sichou keji yunshu qiqiannian (Beijing: Zhongguo fangzhi chubanshe, 2002) 286-287.

\(^9\) Gion matsuri yamaboko rengōkai, Gion matsuri (2014) 112.
In the section on the Kannon-yama float, Zoho includes:

Outer back hanging: Japanese tapestry with a design of Chinese children playing.

This description shows that Kannon-yama owned the outer back hanging of the Japanese tapestry illustrating Chinese children playing. Actually, the Kannon-yama district still owns this outer back hanging (Illust. 2). Thus, we know that this piece is the Japanese production. This piece was produced in or before 1808, according to the *Kannon yama kishin cho* [Kannon yama donation record].

Kannon-yama district owns one more 100-children tapestry (Illust. 3). This piece was produced in China and purchased by the district in the 20th century. The Chinese 100-children tapestries in Kuronushi-yama and Kannon-yama consist of the same materials and techniques sharing the same pictorial theme and stylization. So, the author assumes that the Kannon-yama pieces was produced around the same time as the Kuronushi-yama piece: probably in the first half of the 17th century. However, the Kannon-yama pieces are more suitable for comparison, because they are in much better condition, and the details are much clearer.

In both tapestries, the boys are similarly depicted. However, in the Chinese piece, outlines are much finer and diagonal lines are smoother than the Japanese piece (Illust. 4,5). In order to depict rocks, zigzag-shaped color fields are used in both pieces. The various zigzag lines are placed unevenly in the Chinese piece, whereas some zigzag lines are equally and monotonously spaced in the Japanese piece (Illust. 6,7).

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90 Ibid., 50.
91 Ibid., 117.
Technical analysis of the Chinese piece indicates that warps and wefts are silk, and warps are oriented in a vertical direction in the completed piece. The same features can be observed in the Japanese piece as well. In the Chinese piece, warps are 2 strands of S direction twist plied in Z direction (referred to as S-2Z hereafter, Illust. 8). Contrary, in the Japanese piece, warps have an opposite twist and ply: 2 strands of Z direction twist plied in S direction (hereafter Z-2S, Illust. 9). In the Chinese piece, wefts are S-2Z (Illust. 10). In the Japanese piece, wefts are mostly S-2Z (Illust. 11), but the blue wefts are Z-2S. Therefore, it can be said that the Japanese weavers imitated Chinese materials and weaving techniques as well as the pictorial theme. Nevertheless, the twist and ply of the warps are different in the Chinese and Japanese productions. In addition, exceptions can be found in the Japanese piece regarding the twist and ply of the wefts.

Illustration credits:

European tapestries and the Japanese copies
In the Gion festival, several hangings made of Flemish tapestries remain (Illust. 12). These pieces share the same border design, and Mr. Delmarcel indicated that these tapestries are a part of the series related to the Trojan War story in Iliad and Odysseia (these are referred to Trojan war tapestries hereafter). It is apparent that these were produced in Brabant, Brussels, because the brand mark “BB” (Brabant, Brussels) is woven into one of these pieces. Another tapestry in this series includes the woven mark of Nicaise Aerts, who was active in Brussels from 1580 through 1620. Relevant primary sources and inscriptions on the linings indicate that these tapestries began to be used as float hangings between 1794 and

12 Tapestries produced in southern Netherlands, such as Brussels, Antwerp, and Oudenaarde are described as Flemish tapestries. See Guy Delmarcel, Flemish Tapestry (New York: Harry N. Abrams Incorporated, 2000) 7. Therefore, in this paper, pieces produced in southern Netherlands are described as Flemish.
13 Koiyama henshū iinkai ed., Gion matsuri koiyama (Kyoto: Koiyama, 2006) 22-38.
14 Koiyama henshū iinkai ed., Gion matsuri, 23; Delmarcel, Flemish Tapestry, 362.
15 Koiyama henshū iinkai ed., Gion matsuri, 36; Delmarcel, Flemish Tapestry, 363.
1826 in Kyoto. Therefore, it can be inferred that these Trojan War tapestries in the Gion Festival were brought to Japan between 1580 and 1826. Relevant pieces and primary sources suggest that these Trojan War tapestries may have been given by the Netherlands East India Company as diplomatic gifts to the Shogun or influential high-ranking officials.

Koi-yama tapestry was changed into the hanging sometime between 1794 and 1826; Niwatori-boko piece was changed in 1815; and Araretanjin-yama piece was changed in 1818, Hakurakuten-yama piece was purchased from Tōrō-yama in 1860; thus, it was produced before this time. See Gion matsuri yamaboko rengōkai, 2012, 97-98.

The diary of Nicolaes Coeckebacker indicates that the VOC brought the Netherlandish carpet depicting the story of Rebecca to Japan as a diplomatic gift to the Shogun in 1633. See Nicolaes Coeckebacker, Hirado Oranda shōkan no niki Vol. 3, Translated by Yōko Nagatsumi (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1969) 34.

In the Gion festival, the European tapestry depicting the same theme remains. In addition, some of the Trojan War tapestries were once kept in the Tokugawa Shogunate temple and with the Maeda Daimyo family who had a strong influence on the Shogunate. See Koiyama henshū iinkai ed., Gion matsuri koiyama, 36-38.
We know that four Japanese tapestries imitating European productions can still be found in festivals in and around Kyoto. One is the outer back hanging of a human figure design for the Aburatenjin-yama float in the Gion festival (Illust. 13). We can safely conclude that this Aburatenjin-yama piece was produced in Japan in 1815, as this related record can be found in Zoho:

文化十二歳乙亥六月新調 見送 地織褸錦 もやう人物 18

In June 1815, newly produced; outer back hanging; Japanese tapestry with human figure design.

This Aburatenjin-yama piece includes two kinds of borders, both of which are almost the same as the ones in the Flemish Trojan war tapestries in the Gion festival. It is highly possible that a European tapestry with the same design once existed in the Gion festival, and a Japanese weaver imitated it and produced the Aburatenjin-yama tapestry.

It is worth comparing the Flemish and Japanese tapestries of this type (Illust. 12,13). In the Flemish piece of the Koi-yama float and the Japanese piece of the Aburatenjin-yama float, a king and queen are depicted. Several awkward and unnatural expressions in the Japanese piece can easily be found. For example, in the Japanese piece, the king has an animal figure on his crown, and it is possible that the Japanese cartoonist misunderstood the European feather for an animal.

As for the technical aspects, the following can be observed. In the Flemish Trojan war tapestry for the Hakurakuten-yama float, warps and wefts are wool, and warps are oriented horizontally. These European features are shared on the Japanese tapestry of the Kotobuki-yama float.19 In this Flemish piece, warps are Z-3S, and in the Japanese piece, warps are Z-2S (Illust. 14,15). In this Flemish piece, wefts are Z-2S, and it is the same in the Japanese piece (Illust. 16,17). In the Japanese piece, the twists and ply of the warps are uneven, and thick fibers are often mixed together in warps and wefts. These facts indicate that the Japanese weavers followed the European models, and set the warps in horizontal orientation in the completed image. They also tried to use wool yarns which were quite new for the Japanese weavers to handle at that time. However, the quality of the wool yarns in the Japanese piece is inferior to the ones in the Flemish originals.

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18 Sadahide Fujita, Zōho gione saiki in the section of Ushitenjin-yama, no page. Aburatenjin-yama was called Ushitenjin-yama when this record was written. Ota presumed this piece to be a Japanese production; however, there is no explanation why he considered it so. See Ōta, “Yamaboko kenso,” 202.

19 Kotobuki-yama is one of the floats in Nagahama near Kyoto. In some districts of the Nagahama festival, several Japanese tapestries modeled after European pieces remain. The outer back hanging tapestry in Kotobuki-yama was produced in 1824, (1824 is on its container box). See Sigaken Nagahamashi kyōiku iinkai ed. Nagahama hikiyama matsuri sōgō chōsa hōkokusho (Shiga: Sigaken Nagahamashi kyōiku iinkai, 1996) 328.
Japanese creations
From the 18th century through the early 19th century, the Japanese weavers imitated foreign tapestries. After the early 19th century, they gradually began to create their own tapestry expressions. In this paper, such development processes of the Japanese creations are divided into three stages: The first stage - the first half of the 19th century; the second stage - the second half of the 19th century through the beginning of the 20th century; and the third stage - the first half of the 20th century. As for these Japanese creations, the following questions can be raised: What kinds of foreign elements were assimilated?; Who produced them?; What was the aim for such expressions? Keeping these questions in mind, representative works of each stage is described below.

The first stage
In the early 19th century, the Japanese started to create their own expressions using tapestries. To the best of the author’s knowledge, the earliest datable Japanese tapestry depicting Japanese pictorial themes is the tapestry handed down in the Hashibenkei-yama district Gion festival. The inscription on the container box of this piece indicates the year 1809.20

Other good examples are four tapestries remaining in the Urade-yama district Gion festival. These pieces depict four famous beautiful scenes which were well known during the Edo period: Matsushima, Itsukushima, Amanohashidate, and Mt. Fuji (Illust. 18,19,20,21). Among these pieces, now only the Mt. Fuji piece is different in shape from others: the image

20 Gion matsuri yamaboko rengōkai, Gion matsuri (2014) 128.
side is vertically long with the shorter sides of the rectangle at the top and bottom. However, the author’s detailed observation of this piece revealed that this piece consists of several fragments, and the current shape is the result of the alteration of the original. Using digital images, the author reconstructed the original image of this piece (Illust. 21).

**Illust. 18** (upper left): Matsushima hanging by Monya-jirobei, 19th century, Japan; **Illust. 19** (upper right): Itsukushima hanging by Ikoma, 1831, Japan; **Illust. 20** (lower left): Amanohashidate hanging by Monya-jirobei, 19th century, Japan. **Illust. 21** (lower right): Mt. Fuji hanging by Itoya-hikobei, 19th century, Japan. **Illust. 18-21** are preserved in Urade-yama, and images are from Gion matsuri yamaboko rengōkai, 2014, 62,64. **Illust. 21**: Original status was reconstructed by Masako Yoshida.

The primary source, *Gione uradeyama shinguiri nikki* [Record of sacred utensils of Gion festival Urade-yama], indicates that the Matsushima piece was woven by Monya-jirobei, Itsukushima by Ikoma (in 1831), Amanohashidate by Monya-jirobei, and Mt. Fuji by Itoya-hikobei.²¹ Fortunately, the lost cartoon of Matsushima was found during the author’s research. And this cartoon includes the name of the painter, Beigan Okugawa, who was not the major painter but one of the anonymous cartoon painters. These tapestries are important as the names of cartoon painters, weavers, and production years are available.

In these Urade-yama tapestries, sceneries are depicted using equally and monotonously spaced zigzag lines in color fields (Illust. 22). As mentioned above, these features can be found in the Japanese 100-children tapestry of the Kannon-yama float. In Urade-yama pieces, warps and wefts are silk, and warp orientation is vertical. These features indicate that the Japanese selected the Chinese models rather than the European models as the technical

²¹ Author unknown, *Gione-uradeyama-shinguiri-nikki* (1821-1906), no page.
foundation for their own expressions. Although in Urade-yama tapestries, warps are Z-2S, opposite to the Chinese models, but wefts are S-2Z, same as the Chinese models (Illust. 23). It is necessary to research a larger number of specimens in order to clarify the technical features of the Japanese tapestries of this period.

The second stage
In 1868, the Edo period finally ended, and the new Meiji era began. The Meiji government’s new foreign policy positively assimilated European technology and culture. In the second half of the 19th century through the beginning of the 20th century, development of Japanese tapestry was led by Jinbei Kawashima II (1853-1910) (referred to as Jinbei hereafter). Jinbei supervised tapestry productions of his textile company and visited Europe and America to inspect advanced textile industries. His visit to Goblin in Paris in 1886 strongly influenced him, and, similar to the Goblin tapestries, he began to produce large scale tapestries for interior decoration using Japanese paintings. Jinbei’s tapestries were highly evaluated, and he received prizes and honors in international expositions, such as the Award of Honor at the Paris universal exposition in 1900; the Gold Award at the St Louis universal exposition in 1904, and the Award of Honor of the Liege exposition in 1905.22

Among Jinbei’s various works, one of the finest and most intricate tapestry is The Bodhisattva as merciful mother. This tapestry is based on the painting by Hogai Kano, and Jinbei tried to reproduce Hogai’s painting on this tapestry using numerous color gradations as noted in the Goblin tapestries (Illust. 24,25). Moreover, to this Bodhisattva, he added a veil with an intricate pattern which was not in the original painting (Illust. 26). He presumably intended to display the delicate expression which can be attained only by his tapestries made of fine and high-density silk threads.

Most of his works consist of silk, and warps are oriented in vertical directions in complete images (Illust. 27,28). Therefore, it can be deduced that his technical foundation is based on the Chinese tapestries. Several authors pointed out that Jinbei added Goblin elements to the Japanese tapestries, no other author has indicated that the foundation of Jinbei’s tapestry is Chinese tapestry, so it is quite important to point out that his eclecticism was based on the Chinese, Japanese, and French elements.

23 In the explanation of the tapestry titled Incense offering for the repose of a departed soul at Daitoku-ji, Ōmori described that this piece was made of wool; however, other Jinbei’s tapestries were all made of silk. See Ōmori, Kawashima orimono, 101. For warp orientation, see Ōmori, Kawashima orimono, 102. Ōmori described that the tapestry titled Kannon as merciful mother is rare, as it was woven from the side. Woven from the side means that the warp direction is horizontal, and Omori described that such warp direction is rare among Jinbei’s works. Detailed images of other Jinbei’s works suggest that most of his works have vertical warp orientations. See Tomoko Ishiguro and Yuki Inoue ed., Kenchiku wo irodoru tekisutairu: kawashima orimono no bi to waza (Tokyo: LIXIL shuppan, 2012) 6-9, 52.

24 Ōmori, Kawashima orimono, 87-88.
The third stage
Since the beginning of the Showa period (1926-1989), Seiga Yamaga (1885-1981) became the leading figure of Japanese tapestry creation. In 1927, Seiga submitted a tapestry titled Dutch Ship to the Imperial Art Academy Exhibition, which was given the Special Selection Award. He avoided imitating paintings and ignored perspectives and volume by using numerous color gradations. In this tapestry, he cut a ship in half to show inside crews and cargos, simplified each motif, and lined them up on a flat plane. In 1944, Seiga completed the tapestry titled Dash. In this piece, he expressed the speed of the train with the distinctive technical tapestry features of exaggerated zigzag lines created by turning wefts.

In 1953, Seiga completed the tapestry titled Mt. Manju, which is kept in Yiheyuan in Beijing, China (Illust. 29). This tapestry was used for the outer back hanging of the Hakurakuten- yama float of the Gion festival. As Seiga went to China twice and sketched various Chinese sceneries, the author assumes that this tapestry is most likely based on those sketches. For the weaving of this piece, he used a variety of yarns, such as tightly twisted, chenille, loop, and knot yarns (Illust. 30,31,32,33). These yarns are effective for expressing textures which can be attained only by textiles, not by paintings. In his latter career, he also used new materials such as plastic tapes. He had no specific utilization for his works, as he only intended to create his self-expression as an individual artist.

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25 Yasunosuke Nakajima ed., Teorinishiki Yamaga Seiga sakuhinshū (Kyoto: Kōrinsha, 1972) Fig.3, no page.
26 Ibid., Fig.26, no page.
27 Gion matsuri yamaboko rengōkai, Gion matsuri (2014) 110,113.
Conclusion
The Japanese began to copy the Chinese tapestries in the 18th century, and the Flemish tapestries in the first half of the 19th century. However, it was difficult to distinguish the Japanese copies from the Chinese and Flemish originals. In order to solve this problem, this paper used Zoho as a guideline to distinguish the Japanese copies from foreign originals.

The research results indicate the followings: The comparison of the Chinese and the Japanese productions of 100-children tapestries showed that the stylizations in both productions are similar. The Japanese weaver imitated the material of the Chinese tapestry: silk. The Japanese weaver also imitated the Chinese weaving technique to set the warps in vertical orientation in the completed image. However, the Chinese and the Japanese productions use opposite twist and ply in the warps. There is the possibility that the difference between Japanese copies and Chinese originals lies in the directions of twist and ply of warps, and this aspect should be analyzed further with a larger number of specimens.

The comparison of the Flemish and the Japanese human figure tapestries indicated several differences in stylization with the most obvious feature being the awkward pictorial details in the Japanese productions. The Japanese weaver imitated the material of the Flemish tapestry: wool. The weaver also imitated the Flemish weaving technique of setting the warps in horizontal orientation in the completed image. In both Flemish and Japanese productions, the
directions of twist and ply of warps and wefts are the same. However, wool yarns in the Japanese production include thick fibers, and the quality of these yarns is inferior to the ones in the Flemish production.

The Japanese tapestries of Urade-yama district indicate that in the early 19th century, Japanese weavers selected the Chinese tapestries rather than the Flemish tapestries for their technical foundations in order to express their own pictorial themes. And around the end of the 19th century through the beginning of the 20th century, Jinbei established his own eclecticism based on the elements of the Chinese, Japanese, and French tapestries. Then, in the first half of the 20th century, Seiga employed new materials in order to attain expressions different from paintings but peculiar to textiles.

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