

Okinawa Bingata

– Commemorating the 40th anniversary of the reversion of Okinawa to Japan
September 4 - November 24, 2012

The Japan Folk Crafts Museum has a deep relationship with Okinawa and is widely known for its splendid collection of woven and dyed textiles from Okinawa.

Soetsu Yanagi (1889-1961), founder of the museum, first got acquainted with the beauty of bingata through Marquis Sho-sho who was his classmate in Gakushuin senior high school. In the 49th volume of *Kogei* magazine issued in 1935, Yanagi published three pictures of bingata as plates and highly acclaimed them as the most beautiful works among stencil-dyed works in Japan. In January 1938, soon after the opening of the Japan Folk Crafts Museum, bingata and woven works were shown in the special exhibition titled 'Dyed and Woven Textiles from Ryukyu'. In the end of the year, Yanagi finally traveled to Okinawa where he had wanted to visit to learn Okinawa crafts. There he experienced crafts and thoughts of Okinawa and expressed his admiration in the *Kogei* magazines and also in his book 'The Wealth of Ryukyu'. On the other hand, a stencil-dyer Keisuke Serizawa (1895-1984) and Kichiemon Okamura (1916-2002) who accompanied Yanagi to Okinawa remained Shuri and there they investigated bingata which only a few craftspeople had maintained at that time. They went back to Tokyo, produced what they learned in Okinawa and supported the swift from Ryukyu style to Japanese style kimono of bingata.

Soetsu Yanagi praised bingata which Ryukyu dyers dyed, saying 'When I see bingata, I get impressed with its beauty and its wonder of patterns. There would be nothing more splendid than bingata in stencil dyed crafts.' in the 49th volume of *Kogei* magazine published in 1935. Most of bingata items which belong to the Japan Folk Crafts Museum were produced in 19th century and collected in 1935-45. To their fortune, they barely escaped war damages.

Bingata is considered to become as they are today in 18th century under various influence of China, Japan and South-East Asia in Ryukyu kingdom which was established in the early 15th century. The word 'bin' means colors and 'gata' means patterns.

Bingata has two types of methods; one is stencil-dyeing (*katazome*) and the other is free-hand paste-resist dyeing (*tsutsugaki*). *Katazome*,

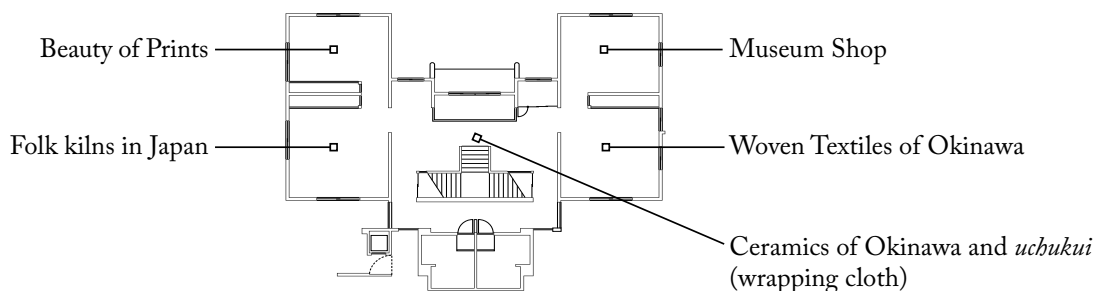
stencil-dyeing were mainly applied to costumes. Stencil papers are cut with a small blade. In some bingata kimonos large stencil papers are used to make large patterns on shoulders and skirts, in others repeated patterns appear with middle-size stencil papers, or others use two types of stencil papers and dye small patterns repeatedly. The process of stencil dyeing is as follows: first, place a stencil paper on a white cloth and then apply resist-paste made from sweet-rice and rice-bran. Then the pattern is dyed with pigments or dyes. Gorgeous is the main image of bingata, but there is *e-gata* is dyed with only indigo and gives a refreshing image. The materials include silk and cotton as well as *choma* and *tonbian* which is cool and suitable to the tropical climate of Okinawa.

The patterns are mostly Japanese and Chinese style such as pine trees, bamboos, ume blossoms, cherry blossoms, paulownias, irises, peonies, cranes, wild geese, water birds, Chinese phoenixes and landscape. It is interesting to find patterns like snow on bamboo leaves or colorful autumn leaves, which could not be seen in the tropical Okinawa. The technique of dyeing is highly advanced and mostly dyed from both sides. The kimonos with large patterns in yellow and red colors were generally used by high classes like royal families and *shizoku* clans (the upper nobility). Ordinary people on the other hand could use kimonos with small patterns in prohibited occasions like festivals and celebrations.

As for *tsutsugaki*, they were applied to *uchukui*(wrapping cloth) or curtains for local theaters. On a *choma* cloth the rice-paste is applied through a tube called *tsutsu* to make patterns like arabesque and auspicious omens with free hand, then some patterns are colored and finally the ground is dyed indigo. The strong and thick undyed white lines would add more appealing beauty to designs of *tsutsugaki*.

In this exhibition, many works of bingata are shown including those which are rarely shown because of damages or faded colors. Visitors could enjoy the splendid and unique world of bingata of the Japan Folk Crafts Museum

FIRST FLOOR



SECOND FLOOR

