

Final Report

Project: Spirit of Nature: A comparison study of Okinawan and Isan Dyeing and Weaving.

Report on the activity result and circumstances of dyeing and weaving in Okinawa.

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The fellowship activities in Okinawa took place during 3-23 July, 2016. The activities involved studying textile crafts for comparison to those in Northeastern Thailand and creating textile art. The schedule combined field trips with a workshop. The collaborators were Professor Misa Ogura, Professor Nobuyuki Ogura and Professor Yoshiko Tawata. Professor Misa Ogura, a Bingata dyeing artist and former professor at the Okinawa Prefectural University of Arts, runs NONTOMI Studio where I took part in a Bingata dyeing workshop. Professor Misa and her husband, Professor Nobuyuki Ogura, were the coordinators and managed the travelling arrangements for the fieldtrip. Professor Yoshiko Tawata, a weaving artist and Professor Misa's former colleague, had contacted the weaving cooperatives in Okinawa and Kume Island prior to my visit.

The initial part consisted of fieldtrips organized to visit the main weaving and dyeing areas in Okinawa mainland and Kume Island, famous for Tsumugi weaving. The activities during the visit were, meeting key people and practicing dyeing and weaving. In addition, there were many museums allowing exploration and study of Okinawan culture, arts and crafts. The Naha city center area was serviced by a monorail which was convenient for my journey. A private car, drove by Professor Ogura, was used for traveling around the main island while a domestic flight was used between Naha airport and Kumejima airport on the island.

The places visited for studying dyeing in Naha city area were as follows:

- Ryubo Arts Salon: a small space in the Ryubo department store where a Bingata exhibition took place. The host of the Bingata exhibition was Hiroshi Kinjo, a contemporary Bingata artist and a former student of Professor Misa, who presented his contemporary style of Bingata dyeing.



Photo 1: Bingata exhibition at Ryubo Arts Salon.

- Shuri Ryusen: a textile corporation located near Shuri castle. This was established as a research institute for the development of the natural dyeing of Bingata and initiated the coral dyeing process using a coral fossil as a mold for dyeing. I visited the third floor to attend a workshop to study the process of Bingata dyeing and seeing a collection of Bingata textiles. Furthermore, I attended a coral dyeing, hands-on experience, event to create a dyed T-shirt.



Photo 2: Coral dyeing at Shuri Ryusen.

- Shiroma Bingata studio, Naha city: the old Bingata producers in Okinawa. The studio has produced Bingata fabric for royalty and the aristocracy since the time of the Ryukyu Kingdom. I met Eijun Shiroma who is now the owner and the 16th generation master craftsman of the studio. He explained the production process of dyeing Bingata and showed me his studio.



Photo 3: Bingata dyeing at Shiroma Bingata studio.

The places visited for studying weaving were as follows:

- Tawata Studio, Naha city: the weaving studio of Professor Yoshiko Tawata. We had a meeting for an introduction to the weaving in Okinawa and arranged the schedule for the project. Professor Tawata also presented her work and studio.



Photo 4: Professor Yoshiko Tawata at Tawata Studio.

- Naha City traditional Arts and Crafts Center, Naha city. There are three sections namely, shop, hands on studio and museum. I attended two Shuri textile weaving classes being, Hana Ori and Rotan Ori.



Photo 5: Shuri textile weaving at Naha City traditional Arts and Crafts Center.

- Okinawa Crafts Promotion Center, Haeburu town. A technician of the center, Makishi Yuka, described the responsibility of the center and the situation of crafts in Okinawa. This center focuses on the promotion of four types of crafts in Okinawa, especially in weaving, dyeing, woodwork, and lacquer ware. The center provided classes for professionals who want to improve their skills as well as the young generation who aim to be craftsmen. Additionally, we also visited the workshop building, particularly the weaving and dyeing classes.



Photo 6: A meeting at Okinawa Crafts Promotion Center.

- Ryukyu Kasuri Hall Cooperative, Haeburu town. Haeburu town has been a major area for Kasuri weaving since the Ryukyu dynasty era. It has been passed on so that nowadays almost all the Ryukyu Kasuri is produced in Haeburu. I visited the workshops and viewed the manufacturing process at this cooperative.



Photo 7: Ryukyu Kasuri Hall Cooperative.

- Ogimi Village Bashofu Hall and Bashofu weaving studio, Ogimi Village. Kijoka, Ogimi Village in the north of Okinawa has been a major producer of Bashofu, cloth made from banana plant fiber. Because the area was full of “Ito Bashofu”, the fabric has been produced for formal and everyday wear since the 13th or 14th century. Bashofu was the representative fabric of Okinawa and designated as the “Important Intangible Cultural Property” in 1974. The hall provided information on the production of Bashofu and the process was observed inside. Afterwards, I met Meiko Taira, the director of the Bashofu hall, at her private weaving studio. She described the history of Bashofu and showed me some work in her studio.



Photo 8: Ogimi Village Bashofu Hall and a meeting with the director, Meiko Taira.

- Chibaha Hana-Ori Association, Okinawa city. Chibana Hana Ori weaving has been famous from around the 18th century in this region. This weaving was used as special, festive clothing for occasions such as Uma-harase on August 14 of the lunar calendar, Usudeku on August 15 of the lunar calendar, and for plays. Ms. Kamida Naomi, a staff member of the association, presented the workshop and explained the character of this weaving, requiring the lifting of the shafts by hand and there are also floating warps on the back of the fabric, which is in contrast to the weaving of the nearby area at Yomitan village.



Photo 9: Ms. Kamida Naomi at Chibaha Hana-Ori Association.

- Yuntanza-hana ui Association, Yomitan village. The Yuntanza-hana ui weaving has a long tradition dating back 600 years, since the “Great trading Age” in the Ryukyu kingdom. This technique, which was presumed to have originated in China and Southeast Asia, has been further developed in the Yomitan village. The staff explained that there are three weaving techniques of Yuntanza-hana ui. The first is Gushibana which uses a bamboo stick lifting the warp to create a pattern. The second is Sogobana, woven by a typical loom and finally, Tibana which uses a finger lifting the warp to create a pattern. I wove a piece of Gushibana with the pattern “Suehirogari”.



Photo 10: Yuntanza-hana ui weaving at Yuntanza-hana ui Association.

- Ikehara weaving studio, Yomitan village. We visited Professor Misa's friend, Ikehara, who is a Sogobana weaver and has her own studio in her house. She let me weave a sample piece of Sogobana in her studio.



Photo 11: Ikehara weaving studio.

- Kumejima Tsumugi Cooperative Association, Kume Island. Kume Island has a famous traditional weaving style that is known as Tsumugi, which is hand spun silk threads dyed with plant dyes and treated with mud mordanting. The threads are woven in the pattern of stripes, checks and Kasuri or Ikat. Kumejima Tsumugi Kasuri was originated in the middle of the 15th century and became the oldest Kasuri fabric that spread to mainland Japan. I spent two days on Kume Island to visit Kumejima Museum and the Kumejima Tsumugi Cooperative Association. Miyuki Miyara, a curator of the museum, introduced me to a chief director of the association, Toru Matsumoto, and other staff. We visited the weaving workshop including all four centers of the association. Furthermore, I had a chance to practice Tsumugi weaving and exchange my knowledge of Ikat in the Northeast of Thailand, by making a presentation to the staff.



Photo 12: A Tsumugi weaving and a presentation at Kumejima Tsumugi Cooperative Association.

Apart from the dyeing and weaving areas, I traveled to many museums in Okinawa to understand many aspects of their culture. Okinawa Prefectural Museum in Naha is a large museum that provided comprehensive information on the history, lives, and culture of Okinawa. Besides, Naha City traditional Arts and Crafts museum focuses on the knowledge of arts and crafts in Naha while Naha City museum of History exhibited the “The Ryukyu Sho Royal Family Ancestral National Treasure Collection: Bingata costume” at the time I visited. In addition, Haeburu Cultural Center comprises a small museum describing the history and culture of Haeburu town, while Kumejima museum provides its own data. Moreover, I visited a private museum in Naha, the Seisa Art and Craft Museum, a collection of notable, local artisan’s works and experienced the young generation’s textile work at Okinawa Prefectural University of Arts.



Photo 13: Okinawa Prefectural Museum, Naha City traditional Arts and Crafts museum.



Photo 14: Naha City museum of History, Haeburu Cultural Center.



Photo 15: The owner of Seisa Art and Craft Museum, Okinawa Prefectural University of Arts.

Later was a Bingata dyeing workshop at Nontomi Studio. The studio is located on the ground floor of Professor Misa's house in Nanjo city, the southern part of Okinawa Island. Professor Misa explained the process of dyeing and helped me finish my art work. Firstly, I designed a pattern with an inspiration from weaving motives of Kumejima Tsumugi and Isan Mudmee (Ikat in the Northeast of Thailand). The pattern was cut on stencil paper and brushed with a rice-paste to cover the paper, with the silk fabric underneath. Next, the foundation liquid was put on the fabric and 3-layers of dye followed. Finally, the dyed fabric was washed, steamed and dried. We worked together over several days to achieve the beautiful Bingata work.



Photo 16: Bingata dyeing workshop at Nontomi Studio.

In summary, from all these activities, I received an abundant amount of experience and knowledge of Okinawan textiles and culture. Okinawa is an interesting prefecture, filled with rich nature and culture. In the past, Okinawa prospered as the Kingdom of Ryukyu and was a crucial site for oceanic trading. Therefore, Okinawa has developed a unique culture including arts and crafts influenced by foreign countries. The traditional dyeing technique in Okinawa, the Bingata, has a long history involving royalty, with a brilliant beauty and refined production. Only local, natural materials were used in the process such as rice-paste, mineral dye, soy bean milk binder, seaweed liquid foundation, deer and human hair brushes, natural fabrics made Bingata unique. The weaving styles in Okinawa are various and have their own histories including sophisticated techniques. We found the weaving areas spread around the main island and the other island in Okinawa prefecture. This project led me to experience Shuri textiles that comprised of Haha Ori and Rotan Ori, Ryukyu Kasuri, Bashofu, Chibaha Hana-Ori, Yuntanza-hana ui and Kumejima Tsumugi. The greatest impression of this project was the kindness, welcome, and collaboration of all the people who were involved, especially the hosts who were Professor Misa Ogura, Professor Nobuyuki Ogura, and Professor Yoshiko Tawata. Finally, the information on Okinawan dyeing and weaving will be compared with that of Isan for a conclusive outcome. The next stages of this project will involve disseminating the result. The first will be an article of "A comparison study of Okinawan and Isan Dyeing and Weaving" which will be published in an upcoming issue of a journal. The second will be creating more works from the same Bingata stencil paper, using materials from Thailand and then sending all the

work to be presented in an exhibition at the Nontomi studio in November 2016. For future collaboration; myself, Professor Misa and Professor Tawata will be able to join a group textile exhibition in Thailand. This will be beneficial to the exchange of culture between Japan and Thailand.