

Katagami in Japonisme –
Katagami Research and History and
the bi-directional influences on Katagami pattern design - Mamiko Markham

Researching Katagami is not a simple – who - where – and – when - exercise.
The social and political situations are also involved.
The laws of the land decreed what fabrics could be worn - including the patterns
and colouring of clothing.

In the 16th century - the domestic wars became more widespread.
In order to keep clear of the fighting, many artisans moved from Kyoto, settling
around Shiroko in Ise, Mie Prefecture.
Records at Ise Shrine in Mie show there were about 130 Katagami merchants
operating in Shiroko and Jike in 1599.

Kitain temple in Kawagoe in Saitama has a picture by Kanou Yoshinobu
around 1615, of an indigo studio where craftsmen are using Katagami for
producing Kimono.
This is the oldest picture in Japan showing a working Katazome studio.

The period of 1753 to 1852 is called the Golden Age of Katagami.
Successful katagami business with dramatic improvements in technique and
design led to higher product quality.

The largest amount of Katagami business was conducted from Shiroko.
Shiroko Katagami merchants were granted business rights nationwide from the
Kishū Domain of the Tokugawa Government. Shiroko Katagami merchants
received special support, protected with trade rights and other benefits, from 1753
to 1852. They created a strong merchant guild for business development over the
whole of Japan. Individuals worked hard supporting each other through community
links under the Kisyū Domain.

All the smaller red circles represent created branch offices of Shiroko Katagami
businesses. Most of these towns also had native merchants, but they were
restricted to local trading. This green circle “Miki” and blue circle “Kyoto” were not
as powerful as Shiroko merchants but were allowed to do business nationwide as
well. Miki, because it had a powerful Daimyou lord.
And Kyoto was always special because the Emperor’s location, where the Imperial
artisans had already been for more than a 1000 years.
Furthermore, most Shiroko merchants originated from Kyoto, so they always had
business relationships.

From my 2 years of Katagami research, I found that about 650 Katagami
merchants existed throughout Japan during the golden age of 1753 to 1852.
They all placed their own company stamp on Katagami when selling them.

Dyeing studios used a hand written signature and/or date and notes necessary for the dyeing workshop after buying Katagami from a merchant.

In researching the Silver Studio collection, my conclusions are reached from a range of factors, naked eye inspection, infra-red photography, physical handling, pattern and technique, plus additional separate information.

My experience has included the handling of about 40,000 pieces of old Katagami. Physical examination is important, providing information on thickness, quality, coating, techniques and size.

Infra-red photography reveals details lost through age, merchants' and quality stamps, calligraphy, markings and repairs.

Pattern type, design and quality mainly assist in dating.

I also analysed pattern relationships with Ukiyo-e, Ceramics and Netsuke for which better date information is available.

Calligraphy is problematic. Apart from handwriting styles, the written and spoken language has changed since that time. However, it can sometimes be rewarding.

The 377 Katagami in the Silver Studio collection has 19 merchant stamps on 97 stencils. Most of them are Shiroko to Edo.

Here is a good example of a Katagami from the Golden age.

Infrared photography showed-up the merchant stamp of Shimamura.

The Silver Studio collection has 35 Shimamura katagami. The business was developed from Shiroko and included Edo by 1828.

Further information can be gained from this Katagami.

Those produced during the golden age often have methods of silk thread reinforcement. The type here is called Itoire, an advanced technique used from 1750 until 1920.

It also displays 'Oikake' registration cut-outs.

These are carved into the pattern and not easy to recognise.

It was a strategy to increase speed of paste-resist application.

'Oikake' were used only during the Golden Age.

Furthermore, a Butterfly pattern (featured here) is an often used Oiran-Geisya Kimono pattern in late Edo period Ukiyo-e, around 1820 to 1850.

During that time, business for Shimamura was increasing in Edo and this Katagami is an example of his high quality technique and design.

Arthur Silver seems to have been interested in this Katagami because he made a print of it . It was printed directly as a stencil.

The result is opposite to that if dyed by Nori paste-resist. But still an attractive result.

To analyse the data of this Katagami.....

Production time is after 1828 when Shimamura started business in Edo. The pattern was fashionable in Ukiyo-e prints around 1828-1850. The techniques were significant of Golden Age Katagami -- Itoire silk thread reinforcement and

Oikake cut-outs. Shimamura had taken charge of running the business in Edo and the North-east Tohoku regions (his territory), therefore he purchased this Katagami from an artisan with good skill in this region.

On the evaluated information, this Katagami is considered to have been made between 1828 and 1850.

And this Katagami was exported to London around 1880 to 1891.

In 1853, the American black ships arrived in Kanagawa ! , to the shock of the Japanese people.

From 1853 until 1867 when the isolation of Japan came to an end, the situation of Katagami merchants changed.

Kisyu Domain support for Shiroko Katagami merchants weakened and their special benefits diminished and they suffered financially.

Also many of the lord generals who supported the Katagami merchants were forced to commit Seppuku suicide at the end of the Edo period.

In the Meiji era (1868 on), many Shiroko Katagami merchants dropped their business and disappeared, but Shimamura continued the Katagami business in Tokyo and began creating Katagami for printing Sometsuke Surie porcelain products.

In 1858, the port of Hakodate, Kanagawa and Nagasaki were opened for trade between UK and Japan, and in 1859 Sir Rutherford Alcock took office as the first British ambassador in Japan.

He supervised the 632 Japanese arts & crafts exhibits for the 'London International Exhibition on Industry and Art' in 1862.

Although Katagami were not present, about 86 items of Sometsuke Surie plates printed by Katagami were displayed.

Seven Samurai attended from Edo. They expected noble class Japanese arts & crafts to be exhibited, but the collected exhibits by Sir Rutherford greatly disappointed the Samurai. They also felt uncomfortable being on show.

This exhibition introduced Japanese arts and crafts officially for the first time in the UK, becoming a trigger for the Japonisme movement.

On behalf of the South Kensington Museum, Christopher Dresser travelled Japan from December 1876 until April 1877. He presented a letter of introduction from the South Kensington Museum along with many gifts to the Meiji government.

He received exceptional treatment during his research travel in Japan as an honoured guest, and he gave export advice on craft affairs.

He visited the Sometsuke Surie porcelain studio in Tajimi in Gifu, which printed by Katagami.

Although Dresser did not mention about an evaluation of Sometsuke Surie porcelain in his book, the porcelain plate produced by him in 1884 may have been influenced by Sometsuke surie porcelain. His pioneering study of Japanese art is evident in much of his work, which is considered typical of the Anglo-Japanese style. With export design guidance from Dresser, the Meiji government

encouraged export crafts. And Katagami merchants produced "Export Katagami" from around 1880 to 1890.

Some of these "export" designs are significantly similar to the artwork in "STUDIES IN DESIGN", a book published 1876 by Christopher Dresser. It is considered that his book fell into the Meiji government's hands during Dresser's stay in Japan.

There are about 27 sheets of Export Katagami in the Silver Studio collection. The designs of these Katagami are a mixture of Japanese and Chinese and obviously not of a traditional Japanese nature.

The export Katagami display a poor level of craftsmanship in cutting quality with most using recycled paper. They were not intended to be used for dyeing and have no merchant stamps.

This Katagami used recycled paper contains script about currency. The character notation is early Meiji. Considering this content, this Katagami is believed to be from around 1877-1885.

Whilst in researching in Japan, I was given access to this publication of some significance. Although authored by Tuer, he seems to have done so in conjunction with a group of collectors.

He clearly identified Export Katagami for what they were.

And where he states - "conventional style" - , there is little doubt that he is referring to a – **European** - conventional style.

Finally - one last point made by Tuer,

"That anyone but a Japanese could execute such difficult work as this is simply impossible."

Of course – I must agree with him.

Thank you.