THE WORLD OF JAPANESE PAPER

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Two concurrent and interrelated events were to have a dramatic and crippling influence on the papermaking industry in Japan—the Meiji Restoration and the development of machine pulp paper. The effect of both fell hard on Japan in the late nineteenth century. With the coming of Commodore Perry to Japanese shores, forcing this closed nation to open her doors to trade and communication with the rest of the world, Japan entered a period of reassessment. The Meiji Restoration (1868) was a necessary attempt to catch up with the technology of the West. Its ramifications included setting up machine pulp paper mills and attempting to industrialize paper production.

The small hand paper mills survived exceptionally well, despite ever-increasing production of machine-made paper, until after the Russo-Japanese War in 1905. The demand for paper was too great to be met by the hand mills, and hand papermaking steadily lost the fight as craftsmen tried to compete with the low prices of machine mills. Naturally the hand papermaking industry suffered severe setbacks. Hand paper craftsmen attempted to modify or semimechanize their methods. Most of these “improvements” damaged washi quality severely. Harsh chemicals, often in excessive amounts, were cooked with the fiber to expedite its breakdown. Cheap wood pulp was added to good bark fiber. Washi suffered.

Some mills succeeded more or less in their battle to survive. Others were forced to close down, and the paper craftsmen took up other work. What is most surprising is the number of hand mills that did survive and kept the old traditions alive and pure, to pass them on to future generations. The cottage mills that still produce the many varieties and colors and variegated complexions of handmade paper—these, I think, are a tribute to an extraordinary way of life, to a unique culture with a set of values that postulates that things of excellence shall not die.

The Sacred, the Magical, and the Mundane

In Japan, much has been made among those who love paper of the fact that the word for god (kami; 神) has the same pronunciation as the word for paper (kami; 紙). Linguistically there is probably no relation whatsoever between these homonyms; their written characters as far as is known have completely different etymologies. But for the Japanese there is often a kind of connection between these words. Ever since papermaking has been practiced in Japan, plain white paper has been a symbol of purity and godliness. To this day it is used extensively in Shinto ritual and worship. Some feel that white paper represents the very essence of Shinto. To a lesser extent white paper is also symbolically used in Buddhism, as well as in superstition and magic. These
uses, however, are most likely an offshoot of cultural associations that link ideas of purity with whiteness and with paper, associations that find their origins in ancient Shinto symbolism, now deeply ingrained in the Japanese consciousness.

A love of cleanliness is innate in the Japanese, Kakuzō Okakura once wrote. In fact, the associations of cleanliness and purity with whiteness must be considered archetypal, for in cultures the world over this equation is universally the same. Why is this? It is probably because a white surface is the most easily defiled. A refined white surface is also difficult for a technically unsophisticated culture to produce—and once produced, or found in nature, equally difficult to maintain in its state of virgin whiteness. To the Japanese mind, white is pure because it immediately betrays every blemish and stain.

The inner white fibers of hemp (asa) and paper mulberry (kašinoki or kōzō) were ancienly used to weave textiles in Japan. People fabricated clothing of these kinds of cloth, which were important items in the households of new brides. Undyed hemp, especially, came to symbolize womanly virtues still greatly stressed in Japan—faithfulness, chastity, and obedience. Like the white cloth, a woman, an old saying goes, must allow herself to be dyed any color her husband chooses.

Shinto is more than a formal religion in the Western sense; it is a total worldview and a way of regarding man’s cosmic purpose on earth. An outgrowth of animistic folk faith and shamanism, Shinto centers its beliefs around spirits or gods (kami) who dwell in rocks, trees, mountains, or other natural phenomena. These mutable spirits are dual-natured, at one moment affectionately protective while at the next fiercely punitive and terrifying. In Shinto, man is a continually evolving creature, ever striving for purity. Although he carries on a passionately emotional, personal dialogue with the kami, the worshiper seeks and receives through the gods a spirituality that binds him to the community in a social and spiritual unity.

Purification and cleanliness are at the core of Shinto. Man must continually seek to refresh his spirit, to cleanse his body, his mind, his home, his altar and shrine, his clothing. All that is clean, pure, and honest, all that is bright, chastely natural, and happy display the essential virtues of Shinto.

Hemp and mulberry fiber as well as the cloth woven from them, natural and undyed, joined rice, salt, and saké as offerings to Shinto shrines. Strips of these fabrics were also tied to branches of the sacred sakaki tree as offerings. When hemp and mulberry papers were first made, worshipers extended the symbolism and substituted paper for the cloth and bark fibers. Today this particular rite is still practiced with strips of folded white washi tied to sakaki branches.
Anciently Shinto devotees believed that their *kami* moved from place to place. To beguile them out of their sacred groves and into the shrines, the people marked off areas of nature that were unspoiled by man’s touch; they bound the area off with straw rope and hung upon it pieces of hemp or flax fiber or cloth. Later, these were replaced with ritually folded white paper strips placed at set intervals, called *shide*. Thus the *shimenawa*, the rope with sacred paper strips, symbolically marked the division between sacred and profane places. All shrines today are marked off with these beautiful, starkly simple “taboo ropes,” which guard against the entry of evil spirits. They also encircle sacred trees and rocks, barns and purified building sites—in fact any object or place that is sanctified.

Sumo wrestling, the oldest Japanese sport, is an offshoot of Shinto worship. Sumo contests took place at public festivals, where they served as a means of divining the will of the gods and as an act of supplication and communal prayer. Today sumo wrestlers wear hanging from their belts cut *shide* of silk, which, it is said, were once made from the ceremonial paper, *danshi* (see p. 206). In the Nō theater, some of whose origins are also in Shinto, similar paper strips are hung high to sanctify the event and as a symbol of the exorcism of evil spirits.

Folded strips of pure white washi are also attached to a kind of wand called *gohei*, which is employed in Shinto purification rites. *Gohei* can mean either just the paper strips folded like *shide* that hang from both sides of the stick in zigzag fashion or the entire wand. The *gohei* has been called by Munemichi Yanagi (Sōetsu’s son) “the most Japanese of symbols for a deity.” Altars in home shrines bear these wands, where different forms of cut and folded paper stand for the spirits of wind, water, and fire. The stick of the *gohei* was originally the stem of a young paper mulberry, and the paper strips were white hemp fiber. First an offering to the gods, gradually these abstractly patterned paper strands came to represent the gods themselves or to indicate their presence. In purification ceremonies, Shinto priests will shake *gohei*, often over objects or people, to exorcise evil spirits. In earlier days of Shinto, the devout took on their long
journeys small pieces of cut paper called shohei, which they scattered on the road before them for divine protection.

Ritually folded paper as used in shrines and for the wrapping of ceremonial gifts is quite old in Japan. Today’s origami, the charming folded paper toy structures, is related to the most ancient and serious ceremonial folding of paper, such as the making of shide. The ceremonial folding of washi became extremely elaborate, and since Shinto lacks the icons of most other religions, the complex cutting and folding also became highly symbolic.

Anyone who has become acquainted with Japanese knows that they are great gift givers. Few know, however, that there is an entire etiquette governing the proper presentation of the most trivial of gifts. A saying from the twelfth century goes, “When you send someone a gift, always wrap it in pure white paper.” This custom goes back to very early times when rice was carefully folded in pure white paper to be presented as offerings to the shrines. The corners of the package were twisted together in a special manner to prevent the rice from falling out. Coins as well were later offered to the shrine wrapped in white paper. It is interesting that a type of currency commonly distributed in old Japan was coins sealed in washi envelopes with the signet of the bank and duly marked for value; the packets were passed from hand to hand, unopened. Even today when money is passed from one person to another, either as a gift or in a business transaction, it is polite to wrap it first in paper. Special envelopes are now made for this purpose.

In Japan, paper fortunes are often bought or obtained without charge from shrines. Out of a large box, the hopeful chooses a bamboo stick, the hidden number on it leading to a slip of paper bearing either a good or bad fortune. Some Japanese believe ardently in these messages thought to come from god-spirits, and they guide their lives by them. Another paper talisman popular in Japan is what is called a “dream-treasure poem.” According to custom, the first dream of the new year is highly symbolic of events fated to come during the course of the year. In order to enhance the possibilities for auspicious
dreams, people will buy these dream-treasure poems from a street hawker. In Japanese the poems read the same backwards and forwards: “In the sleep of the long night I hear, half asleep, the sound of a ship coming in, riding over the waves—oh, what a pleasant dream.” The belief is that, by reading the poem before sleeping, one might dream of the treasure ship that bears the seven gods of wealth and happiness—the most propitious omen for the coming year.

Cut-out paper dolls are not usually considered toys in Japan. On the contrary, paper cutouts have for hundreds of years acted as effigies and charms against disease and evil spirits in Shinto, Buddhism, and rural shamanism. In China, paper effigies of men and animals burned along with the corpse were believed to play an important role in helping the dead reach paradise in comfort and luxury. Some people believe that the symmetry of paper-cuts has a protective effect; this is true in such diverse parts of the world as Mexico, Poland, and Japan.

Early in Japanese history, anthropomorphic images made from grass and wood were used in rituals to absorb the sins and bad fortunes of people. The images were then thrown into the river or ocean, carrying away with them the effective evil. Similar exorcism rites using paper effigies were also practiced in China before the fifth century. In Japan, paper cutouts in the shape of kimonos, called kata-shiro, are objects used in certain Shinto purification ceremonies that take place in the early spring. The kata-shiro and the rites associated with it have survived unchanged through the centuries. The worshiper buys a fresh white paper image at his shrine. At home he inscribes on it his name, sex, and birth date, and possibly also a prayer. Breathing on the paper, he rubs it over his body and returns it to the shrine, which arranges to cast the collected kata-shiro into a flowing body of water.

In early spring, in various areas of Japan people make dolls of paper—sometimes a group, sometimes a single couple—and float them down the river in small straw boats. These usually simple dolls represent all the spirits of evil that bother children. Originally the dolls were magical images that the whole family rubbed over their bodies or that
took on voluntarily all evil and misfortune. These are regional variations of the custom that gradually evolved into the girls’ Doll Festival in March, which still bears some vestiges of the original magical rites.

Paper charms were also used to keep away sickness and pestilence. Hōkō-san is the title for a domestic servant. On Shikoku a crude Hōkō-san doll of papier-maché is given to a sick child to hold; then the doll is thrown into the ocean, taking with it, it is believed, the child’s illness. The history of the Hōkō-san doll is a touching one. Once a homely but tender-hearted maid by the name of Omaki was in the service of a local samurai. One day the samurai’s daughter became very ill with a contagious disease—the doctors announced that they could not cure her. Omaki felt that if she could only catch the disease, perhaps it would restore the little girl to health. And so she exposed herself to it boldly while attending to her little charge, until finally she caught it. Because the disease was so contagious, Omaki was put out upon a secluded island, where she died. Ever since, the Hōkō-san doll has been a charm against children’s sicknesses.

Washi is a significant material in Buddhist rite and custom, although it is not as symbolically intimate to major Buddhist tenets as it is to Shinto. Religious devotion demanded, in some Buddhist sects, the painstaking copying of sutras. Paper, of course, was an essential sutra-writing material, and as such received the reverential care and respect paid to all articles of devotion. To a smaller extent this is still true today. The act of copying sutras is considered itself a kind of meditation, in which the self is given a back seat and the more instinctual mind solemnly copies the characters. Many beautiful old copied sutras survive from centuries of these Buddhist devotions. This act of copying must sometimes have been accompanied by great religious fervor, for some sutras were written in blood. Copied sutras were usually presented to temples or shrines. Among the most opulent and finest examples of embellished papermaking in the world are the sutras known as the Heike Nōkyō, copied in the twelfth century by members of the Heike (Taira family) and preserved in the famous Itsukushima Shrine near Hiroshima.

**Kamiko**

Actually washi was used early in Buddhism in a more intimate manner than one might suspect, for it is said that the first paper clothing, *kamiko*, was worn by priests as underwear. Whether or not one can trace its origins to such elevated beginnings, it is known that in the eleventh century, when Esoteric Buddhism was being actively propagated in Japan, monks began wearing white paper robes made by them-
selves in keeping with a way of life both plain and severely ascetic—significantly, the handmade clothing expressed their independence from the aid of feminine hands.

*Kamiko* is nothing more than thick paper specially treated with starch from a type of arum root (*konnyaku*; devil’s tongue) for strength and water-resistance. The treated sheets are rubbed and wrinkled until supple. Edges of the sheets are glued together to make one long roll from which patterns are cut and sewn into clothing just as if it was a bolt of cloth. Because it is strong, retains heat well, and is water-, wind-, and damp-proof, robes, coats, jackets, and vests of *kamiko* have been popular for centuries.

In time *kamiko* came to be manufactured all over Japan, especially in areas where paper was made. According to old documents, the towns of Shiroishi in Miyagi, Aki-kawa in Shizuoka, Kei in Wakayama, Yatsushiro in Kumamoto, and what is present-day Osaka were all noted for their production of *kamiko*. Farmers and commoners made their own clothing and bedding from it, since paper was cheap and *kamiko* was easily manufactured at home. Twisted *kamiko* strips were used to secure obi sashes, as thread for prayer beads, and as sandal thongs.

Nothing was simpler, plainer, or humbler than *kamiko* clothing. For that reason it appealed strongly to the samurai temperament and fit the warrior spirit (*bushidō*), which took root and blossomed through the Kamakura and Muromachi periods. *Kamiko* tangibly expressed that quality of ingenuity toward which the noblest minds strove during Japan’s middle ages.

Whereas the poor wore paper clothing because they could not afford anything else, artists, high priests, the nobility, and military leaders became inordinately fond of *kamiko*. That of the poor was rough and rust colored from persimmon tannin, but the *kamiko* of the well-to-do was a pure white, often embossed with patterns or dyed in a variety of intricate colors. A *kamiko* robe about four hundred years old worn by the famous general Uesugi Kenshin is still in existence. Such paper robes were often lined with silk and gilded around the collar and sleeves—*kamiko* wearers of old knew that the prosaicness of the paper made the opulence of the gilt all the more apparent.

During the early Edo period (1615–1868), *kamiko* became more widely worn, one reason being that washi production was at its height and a great deal of good handmade paper was available. The poet Bashō loved and wore *kamiko*. The writer Ihara Saikaku used the expression *kamiko rōnin* in the late 1600s to describe a rōnin (a masterless samurai) so poor he had but one paper kimono—yet would not accept charity.

Now *kamiko* was popular both for inner and outer garments, especially in the form of short coats with silk or cotton linings. Cotton or silk floss was usually packed between

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the paper and cloth layers for added warmth. Generally kamiko garments were sewn with hemp thread; small triangular-shaped pieces of cloth were used to patch rips. After the middle of the Edo period, kamiko went out of vogue, again becoming clothing only for the poor. Kamiko linings for garments were used ubiquitously in Japan throughout the Edo period and up until this century.

Kamiko robes continue to be the clothing of certain of the priesthood up to the present. Vestiges of this ancient use of kamiko can be seen today in the Omizutori ceremony at Tōdai-ji temple in Nara. Omizutori means “sacred water drawing.” This ceremony is at least twelve hundred years old, dating back to early Buddhist days in Japan. Preceding the advent of spring, Buddhist monks spend two weeks or more in heavy meditation, self-reflection, and ascetic training. During this period, each makes for himself a kimono out of undyed, handmade paper. The monk is required to rub, soften, and waterproof the material for his own robe. Between February and March, at the coldest point of winter, the monks go into seclusion wearing only these robes, enduring austerities in the cold and snow. Smoke from burning incense sticks gradually blackens the kamiko garments; holes are worn into them where the monks’ knees have rubbed through the paper in prayer and meditation. Then when all the austerities have been completed, the priests return for the ceremony. At midnight the kamiko-robed monks proceed down the temple corridors, carrying lighted torches and chanting prayers. In an open area of the compound the monks brandish these immense burning torches, making great circles of flaming light in the night air. Since the fire is believed by these Buddhists to be power against evil, worshipers pursue the flying sparks, certain that such magical flames burn nothing on which they land. Then the sacred water, believed to have flowed all the way from Wakasa in the north to Nara, is drawn from the well. At the end of the ceremonies the monks burn their white paper robes in a purging bonfire. Although the ceremony is Buddhist, it bears touches of Shinto in the sacred use of white paper—especially washi that has touched the body—in this rite of purification.

Today Kurodani near Kyoto and Shiroishi near Sendai, once famous for their kamiko, still produce fine-quality kamiko on a limited scale. In some very rural parts of Japan, farmers manufacture kamiko for their own use just as their parents and ancestors did before them.
Shifu

One other paper textile besides kamiko developed in old Japan, a much more sophisticated product that took considerable ingenuity to develop. This is shifu, woven paper cloth. Strips of paper are finely twisted or spun into a continuous thread. This surprisingly strong and supple "yarn" is used as the weft threads (usually) in weaving bolts of cloth. Like kamiko, shifu, too, is cut and sewn into clothing and accessories.

While kamiko is excellent as winter wear, shifu is just as excellent for summer wear. It is light and porous, having the unique ability to absorb body perspiration and throw it off rather than retain the moisture and cling to the skin. Shifu has served as underclothing, as summer kimonos, obis, book covers, bags and purses, and notably as finely meshed mosquito netting.

How such an unusual product as shifu ever developed is not clear, but sometime around 1630 techniques for making it appeared in Japan. The earliest documented shifu production took place in Shirakawa, a town near Mt. Masu in that papermaking district of Fukushima Prefecture. It is just as probable, however, that the first shifu was made in Shiroishi, Miyagi Prefecture, since the best shifu in the largest quantities issued from this castle town under Lord Katakura Kojūrō, who paid tribute to the Date clan in nearby Sendai.

The idea behind shifu very likely evolved out of the ancient use of kōzo bark for weaving cloth coupled with the more recent development of strong paper cord. A certain local Shiroishi samurai named Sanada devised a method of making extremely tough cord out of twisted paper for armor bindings. Reportedly, no sword could cut through it. Someone began plaiting this same paper cord into sandals, and discovered that they outlasted two or three similar pairs made of straw. Fire fighters adopted them, soaking the sandals in water before conflagrations to make them impervious to flames and nails. Eventually, someone thought of using the finer grade of this paper cord into cloth and discovered that it was a lightweight, soft, and airy material.

Whereas kamiko had long been manufactured by the lower-ranking samurai, now shifu became the exclusive product of samurai families during idle periods of peace. Papermaking districts such as Yamato (Nara), Awa (Chiba), Tosa (Kōchi), Echizen (Fukui), Iwashiro (Fukushima), and Tamba (Kyoto and Hyōgo) were also soon noted for their shifu. Eventually it was made wherever paper was made and by all classes of people.

Farmers made a crude type of shifu in which both warp and weft were spun paper. This morōjifu often formed the underwear of the lower classes. The more refined moment-
jifu was shifu with cotton warp and spun paper weft, traditionally woven in one color such as indigo or with one colored stripe. Momenjifu was used in making covers for summer pillows and mattresses, coats, and mosquito netting. Also it was stencil dyed to make lovely obis and kimonos. The most refined shifu of all was kinujifu with a silk warp and spun paper weft. This expensive and precious variety, quite difficult to make well, was given in long rolls as gifts by the wealthy. Kinujifu is said to be deliciously cool to wear in summer.

Shifu experienced a major revival during World War II, when goods such as cotton cloth were scarce and people were required to cultivate great resourcefulness. Many army uniforms of shifu still exist in superb condition. After World War I the making of shifu had all but died out completely until around 1938–39, when Nobumitsu Katakura, a direct descendant of Lord Katakura Kojūrō, headed a group that conscientiously revived this ancient art in its old pure form once again in Shiroishi—and to this day is carried on there by himself and his daughter with paper supplied by Tadao Endō. The making of shifu has also been revived in Tamba by Michiko Kawaguchi, weaver and wife of a Buddhist priest.

Architecture—Shōji, Fusuma, and Byōbu

In ancient times, the Japanese house was constructed as a single, large, open space surrounded by four outer walls. A residence of the aristocracy from the eighth century on was an open and fluid structure that permitted free circulation of air—and also dust, noise, people, insects, and pets, if any. As a result, many types of partitions to retain heat, stop drafts, and provide privacy were developed. Most of these were portable, some translucent, all relatively lightweight. Paper was an ideal material for partitions because of its lightness, heat retentive properties, ability to “breathe,” to diffuse and reflect light, and to provide a surface for artistry. From this early use in partitions, paper has had a profound influence on Japanese architecture and thus on the lives and aesthetic concerns of the people.
Shōji

Single-panel partitions mounted on a stand and utilizing paper were known as shōji. There were many types—fusuma-shōji, karakami-shōji, akari-shōji, and so on—depending on their use and construction. In time, shōji were inserted and fixed under lintels, and, later, grooved channels were contrived so the shōji could slide and be opened and closed. The akari-shōji ("illumination" shōji) developed into the form known today simply as shōji—thin, bright paper pasted onto one side of a light, wooden lattice frame. Used as windows or as room partitions, shōji have had a profound effect on the world’s architecture.

Fusuma

Fusuma-shōji were single-panel partitions surfaced on both sides with thick paper or cloth and decorated with painting or calligraphy. Karakami-shōji were surfaced with "Chinese paper" printed with patterns in color and mica. These forms also developed into sliding panels running in grooves, and both types in time came to be known simply as fusuma. Today fusuma are used as sliding doors between rooms and as decorative sliding panels to cover storage alcoves.

The structure of a fusuma panel is a close cousin to or identical with the structure of a single leaf of a folding screen (byōbu). The aim of providing a light, portable, paper-faced panel that is strong, will not warp or wrinkle, and can be easily repaired or resurfaced may sound simple, but the making of fusuma and byōbu is a highly exacting craft involving great skill. A constant balance of tension must be achieved to keep the surface taut without the panel buckling.

The fusuma skeleton is a lattice of light wood in a frame of sturdier slats, reinforced at the corners and at the fingerpicks. Layers of paper are pasted over this; a common number is six layers, though this may vary. The first layer is a single large sheet, which is pasted onto the wooden frame and skeleton. The second and third layers are "half-size" (hanshi) sheets pasted at the top only and overlapping the sheet below. The fourth, fifth, and sixth layers again use single, large sheets the size of the panel. In the fourth, the entire paper surface is pasted and applied; only the edges of the fifth sheet are coated.
with paste and then the sheet is attached; for the sixth layer, the entire sheet is given a paste coat. Finally, decorative borders are attached to the fusuma. Different types and strengths of paper may be used for the various layers, but this depends upon the individual craftsman’s preference. The balance of tension achieved between paper and wood is designed to give the panel strength and a long life, but if even a small member of the internal latticework weakens or breaks, the entire structure will eventually warp and must be taken apart and repaired. Like any craft, there are precision and sloppy craftsmen; it is an economy to employ the best skill in ordering fusuma and byōbu.

Byōbu

Screens of two or more (even-numbered) panels, six panels being the most common style, without a supporting stand, are known as byōbu. The history of the screen is old; there is a record of Emperor Temmu (reigned 673–686) receiving byōbu from the Silla kingdom of Korea. Decorative byōbu were a standard feature in the residences and palaces of the Heian aristocracy. Originally, each panel was decorated as a unit, but with later changes in architectural style and with the improvement in the method of hinging, the entire screen was used as a single, unbroken surface. These developments paved the way for the glory of the gold-backed, painted byōbu of the Momoyama period (1573–1615).

The uses of paper in Japanese architecture have had a profound influence on Japan, and, primarily in this century, on the architecture and interior design of many countries throughout the world. Shōji and fusuma are, in their stark clarity of line and austerity, timelessly modern and adaptable.

A people living in houses divided by sliding paper partitions and windowed with translucent paper screens will behave and think quite differently from a people surrounded by stone walls, stout wooden doors, and glass windows. The residents of a traditional Japanese house had little sense of separation from either nature or each other. In such a physical setting, privacy is largely an internal state; formality, deference, and quietude allow the smooth flow of everyday life. These qualities are an integral part of Japanese society today. In a small, interior space, walled with warm materials, the Japanese can relax—a person expands; the walls of such a room become like the skin of one’s body. Big rooms and hard materials have the opposite effect—the person shrinks; he becomes divorced from his living environment. A masonry wall, however beautiful and secure, constantly states its immutability both as an enclosure and in its longevity. The very ephemerality of paper used in architecture allows the Japanese to relate to their

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homes intimately in every sense. One knows the fusuma will wear out in a few years. The annual task of changing the shōji paper was a family activity. And, in warm weather, shōji and fusuma can be quickly removed from their channels to open the house to the outside.

The light coming through the shōji—the soft, diffuse light that hints rather than states—influenced house interiors and, further, the kind of objects that fit into these interiors. Potter Shōji Hamada tells of making a raku ware plaque with Japanese lead glazes he brought with him when he first went to England with Bernard Leach in 1920. But, he said, “It lacked something. The soft raku glaze colours blend well in a Japanese room of wood, paper, grass, and clay, but did not harmonize with a room of stone walls and glass windows; the surroundings were too hard.” He proceeded to make a paper window screen, and, in its soft light, the effect of the raku panel changed. “Without such light and the appropriate materials surrounding it, raku ware was not satisfactory in England.” Hamada and Leach then turned to local materials and made slipware with English lead (galena) glazes; because of the nature of the local glazes and the way they were used, such slipware successfully fit into the English homes. It is not an exaggeration to state that the light from the paper shōji must have influenced the very essence of the Japanese aesthetic sensitivity and, in turn, the techniques of the craftsmen who made objects to use in Japanese rooms.

**Lanterns and Lamps**

Flexibility, strength, body, lightness, and soft translucency are qualities that have made washi the ideal substance for lanterns. When and how paper was first given this use in Japan has not been ascertained. The first paper shades were simple cones mounted around the heads of the standing oil lamps of the aristocracy and clergy. The paper cones diffused the light and protected the taper’s flame from the wind. Yet the ribbed paper shade took hundreds of years to develop from this simple beginning, a fact surprising in a country in which ribbed fans and umbrellas were long and well known.
According to some sources, the folding paper lantern (chôchin) is said to have been introduced from China in the Muromachi period (1333–1573), seemingly by Zen priests. Other sources, however, suggest that collapsible chôchin were not made until the latter part of the sixteenth century, a time when chôchin styles were improved in general. By the Edo period they were in common use.

Special kôzo paper was made for chôchin, and centers of lantern production such as Gifu and Odawara grew up in proximity to quality paper-producing areas. The construction of the chôchin allowed a variety of forms and sizes, and numerous types developed, based on the basic spiral or hoop form of the supporting ribs.

Even with its many practical uses, the lantern did not lose its religious association. Lanterns of various types still play an important role in Japanese festivals, especially the Obon (All Souls) observances in summer and other summer festivals in which light is a central element.

Probably the most famous “lantern” festival is the Nebuta Festival of Aomori Prefecture, in which immense paper lantern-floats are constructed and painted into the likenesses of fantastic warriors, gods and goddesses, and monsters. In neighboring Akita Prefecture, towering arrangements of chôchin fixed about a central pole are carried through the streets. The men compete in balancing these poles on chin, forehead, shoulder, and back. Every town and hamlet in the Noto Peninsula has its kiriko festival, featuring vertical, rectangular “lanterns” borne on two horizontal poles. A kiriko may be so large that it requires thirty strong men to carry it or it may be just the right size for two toddlers to heft.

Contemporary sculptor Isamu Noguchi recognized the design possibilities of the chôchin in the early 1950s, when he began designing and making his akari lanterns. Akari means “illumination,” and its character combines radicals for sun and moon. Made of quality Mino paper and utilizing the traditional lantern-making skills of Gifu, where a spiral rather than a hoop skeleton is employed, Noguchi’s akari challenge the density of material itself and excite qualities of light. “The ideal of akari,” he writes, “is exemplified with lightness (as essence) and light (for awareness). The quality is poet-
ic, ephemeral, and tentative. Looking more fragile than they are, akari seem to float, casting their light in passing. 8 With Noguchi’s exceptional feel for materials, this is what they do.

Noguchi’s designs are so strikingly simple and valid that they have enjoyed a constant popularity throughout the world, providing thereby an inexpensive and attractive lighting fixture. They go anywhere successfully, finding their way into rooms ranging from the humblest student lodging to the most sophisticated homes and apartments.

Fans

Why the fan assumed such an important role in Japanese culture is still something of an enigma. Even in a country of hot, sultry summers, they do more than just push air—they are the essential sidearms of etiquette, the symbol of felicity and good fortune, respect, and all the refinements of Japanese civilization. As a result, the fan motif is ubiquitous, cropping up everywhere from textile patterns to gold lacquer decoration, from metal door pulls to ceramic designs, and even finding reflection in the shapes of such objects as food vessels.

There are two kinds of fans in Japan—the folding fan (ōgi or sensū) and the round, nonfolding type (uchiwa). Both have long histories. The uchiwa is the older of the two and is thought to be a Chinese import. The ōgi is believed to be a Japanese innovation, and this fan, in particular, reached heights of sophistication and artistry not found elsewhere in Asia.

The uchiwa has a stemlike handle and is paddle shaped. This type of fan exists throughout the world, and some say its shape developed naturally out of necessity in many warm climates. When it first appeared in Japan is not known, but a sophisticated form most likely was brought from Korea in the sixth or seventh century, if not before. During the Heian period (782–1184) the Chinese “drum style” uchiwa—a hollow frame covered on both sides with silk or paper—was known. The ribbed uchiwa, thought to be of Korean origin, became common in Japan roughly around the fourteenth century. The prosperity and ease of travel in the Edo period (1615–1868) saw the development of a great variety of regional styles of uchiwa, many of which are still made today.

The ribbed uchiwa is simply constructed—ribs radiate out from the top of the
handle and are covered with paper. This form commonly utilizes a single stalk of bamboo, the appropriate length above a node being split to form the ribs; the stalk below this node is cut the proper length and shape to form a comfortable handle. The simplicity of its shape suggests it was inspired by a large, tropical leaf, and, in fact, certain types of palm fronds, dried and cut to shape, resemble the uchiwa exactly and are used for the same purpose.

Since uchiwa tend to be large and do not fold, they are found mainly in the home. Besides keeping one cool, they were used to fan kitchen and bath fires; large ones were employed to blow chaff from rice. Uchiwa are often brightly lacquered or coated with persimmon tannin (shibu) to waterproof them and lengthen their life. The practice of dipping a lacquered uchiwa into water on sweltering days may not provide a cooler breeze, but the effect is pleasing and refreshing. “Edo uchiwa” were decorated with ukiyo-e prints.

There are two major types of ōgi: the hi-ōgi, constructed of thread-tied cedar or cypress slats, and, developing from that, the papered fan, or kawahori. In the Heian period, the former was known as the “winter fan,” and the latter as the “summer fan.” An eighth century prototype of the former has been found, so its origins presumably go back to the Nara period, when courtiers first began using fans as an important wardrobe accessory. The papered and folding kawahori was developed during the Heian period, and by the end of the tenth century was being exported to China. It reached the peak of its development in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, when fans were essential accessories of cultural refinement and elegance. Both early types of ōgi were used primarily by the aristocracy. They were highly decorated, and many styles developed, some being associated with the various levels of court society.

The original kawahori was papered on one side only, and the five thin ribs could be seen from the back. The Chinese improved on this by inserting the ribs into the fan paper, making them invisible and providing two unbroken surfaces to receive decoration. This Chinese ōgi was imported into Japan and was again improved upon. The term sensu first appeared, along with various terms for different fan types, probably in the fourteenth century and today has become the word used for the common fan. Ōgi now has the implication of a folding fan used on formal occasions, notably ceremonies, in the Nō drama, and Japanese dance. Styles proliferated until the Edo period, when ōgi production was controlled by the shogunate and the forms became fixed.
In the meantime, the hi-ogi grew in size and degenerated into a largely ornamental object. Its use largely died out in the Muromachi period, but today there has been a modest revival of fans delicately carved from aromatic woods such as camphor and cedar.

Chinese ogi found their way to Europe, where the folding fan later became a fashion. Nineteenth century Japan-made export fans were modeled on the style produced in Europe. After World War I, surplus stock of this export style was sold on the domestic market; it shortly became the standard summer fan in Japan and remains so today.

Fan-making is a highly developed craft. The paper used must be strong enough to endure being constantly folded, snapped open and closed, and the constant battering that a fan is subject to. It takes years of experience for a fan-maker to acquire a knowledge of papers and glues and to learn the shaping and tapering of ribs that give the form balance, delicacy, and grace. Thin, fragile-looking papers of great strength are sought for fans; thus, gampi papers, even though expensive, are preferred fan papers. Historically, the amount of artistic ingenuity that has gone into the decoration of the fan’s paper surface is overwhelming—whether painting, calligraphy, printing, or decorative embellishment of the paper itself.

**Umbrellas (kasa)**

There are two Chinese characters used for kasa: the first means a flared covering held aloft on a stick; the second means a covering worn directly on the head, that is, a flared hat. The first means, in effect, “umbrella,” but is also applied to such things as mushroom caps and lampshades.

The introduction of the umbrella to Japan is still obscure. A prototype of the common umbrella (bangasa) was possibly a sixth century Korean import, but originating in China or perhaps in an area further west. Around 800 A.D., a kind of parasol called a higasa appeared, constructed of paper stretched over bamboo ribs, with a diameter of four to five feet. Higasa were carried by attendants to protect members of the aristocracy and high clergy. For centuries to follow, the Japanese, as the Chinese before them, used the umbrella, especially large red ones, in ceremonies and processions. Eventually priests of lower rank began carrying their own kasa; during the eighteenth century, everyone adopted the custom.

Quality washi is of prime concern in the making of kasa. Paper such as Yamanouchi-shi, Hosokawa-shi, and Kurodani’s shibu-gani are strong, excellent umbrella papers that can withstand bending and handling. Washi is cut into isosceles triangles as
long as the umbrella body. For additional strength, small, rectangular pieces are cut and glued where the bamboo ribs and spokes meet, then the triangular strips of washi are glued along the length of the rib spokes. In some umbrellas, wide paper strips cover several ribs each, but in the stronger, more finely constructed ones there is a strip of paper for each gap between spokes. *Shibu*, the processed juice of unripe persimmons, gives the paper strength and makes it water resistant. The *shibu* may be applied by the papermaker or by the umbrella-maker. Paper umbrellas for gardens and for carrying in snow and rain are coated with a high-quality drying oil (*kiri* or *egoma* oil). This adds flexibility to the paper and increases its water-repellent quality.

**Kites**

China is assumed to be the home of the kite, for records of kite flying there date to the Han dynasty (206 B.C.–220 A.D.). Originally, Chinese kites were used for surveying and other practical purposes, but eventually kite flying also came to be enjoyed for pleasure and as a children’s pastime. Japan learned of this Chinese flying device during the Heian period (794–1184), it is thought, possibly from the Koreans. Paintings and legends of kites suggest that, quite early in their history in Japan, kites were associated with temples.

The most fantastic part of kite history is the kite’s use as a human carrier. Records relate how enormous kites were medieval military carriers, bearing spies into and out of cities and camps under siege. They were also used as observation posts—man’s first reconnaissance flights.

In the Edo period, the kite became a children’s amusement, customarily flown during the bright days of the New Year’s celebration. Yet, the kite retained its place in the adult world too. The Japanese sought to make larger, more majestic kites, which, by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, had become so large that kite devotees needed the length and strength of ship tow ropes to control their aeronautical constructions. The *wan-wan* kite of Shikoku appeared at the end of the last century with an innovative structure employing a particularly tough *kōzo* paper. One *wan-wan* made in 1906 was 20 meters wide, had a tail of 146 meters, and weighed two tons. It required 150 men to launch and fly.

Today, in various parts of the country, districts within a town or small neighboring towns compete in battles of giant kites. The tails of these kites are studded with small knives and pieces of broken glass as well as whistles and noisemakers. Each team launches its kite on opposite banks of a river and then tries to cut loose the other team’s kite.
Japanese kites have been and still are made of washi, for it is strong, flexible, porous, and lightweight. Kite paper is nearly always a variety of kōzo-gami, sometimes cut with a portion of chemical pulp. Some have said that pure kōzo kite papers are stronger wet or damp than dry, but I have no experience to substantiate this, and rather doubt it. However, kite-makers, especially those producing the giant kites for kite battles, are most particular about the paper they use. They are naturally reluctant to reveal paper types, since this information is a trade secret. Traditionally, kite papers were most frequently selected from the better quality, pure kōzo papers native to the maker’s area. Such paper must be able to withstand enormous stress in wind, sometimes rain, and general knocking about; therefore medium-thick, pure kōzo papers such as Nishinouchi from Ibaragi Prefecture and kōzo papers from Iiyama, Nagano Prefecture, are excellent. Umbrella papers are often used as well, although for kites they are not oiled or water-proofed. All kites in Japan are painted—plain white being symbolic of mourning—and since some of the designs are outlined in hot wax, this in effect moisture-proofed the paper somewhat.

The paper is pasted directly onto the bamboo splints forming the backside of the kite’s structure. Wheat flour paste, and sometimes rice paste, are favored. A few kite-makers wrap the bamboo bones first in thin kōzo paper, then paste the kite paper onto the wrapped skeleton; this makes a stronger kite, since paper is pasted to paper rather than to bamboo.

The koi-nobori, or “climbing carp” streamers, are favorite decorations in Japan and abroad. Not really kites but wind socks, these streamers depict the indomitable carp who fight their way upstream to spawn, thus symbolizing courage and manliness. Once made only of paper, cotton carp streamers were introduced in the late nineteenth century; today they are largely of synthetic fabrics.

**Dolls and Toys**

Paper was one of the major materials used in making toys and dolls. Often recycled sheets and pulp were formed and painted, but the brightly printed chiyogami of Edo and Kyoto and also the crisp strength of newly laid kōzo paper were fully utilized. The paper toys of Japan are a world unto themselves, and the making of traditional, local paper toys has recently seen a great revival. Many urban housewives and
girls with the spare time for a hobby have taken up the making of sophisticated paper dolls and figurines—both traditional and modern—and provide a steady and major market for the makers of highly decorative colored papers. But perhaps no papier-maché figure is as ubiquitous and well loved as the Daruma.

The Daruma figure—both the toy and the good luck doll—is found everywhere in Japan, a caricature of red-robed Bodhidharma, who brought Zen (Ch'an) Buddhism from India to China. The son of a king of southern India, this Buddhist monk traveled to China sometime between 470 and 520 A.D. According to legend, he spent nine years alone in meditation facing a wall. So long did he sit, it is said, that his legs withered away. But he achieved enlightenment. The usual form of the Daruma toy is weighted at the bottom and always rights itself when pushed over. Like Bodhidharma, it represents dauntless perseverance and persistence.

This doll came to Japan sometime in the Muromachi period (1333–1573). Although wooden Daruma are common, the papier-maché dolls are the most popular. Layers of pulp or sheet paper and glue are applied, dried, and built up over a clay or wooden mold. The papier-maché form is then cut in half, removed from the mold, a weight inserted (if desired), the halves joined together again with paper, and the form painted. Recycled paper is usually used.

In some towns in Japan, papermakers devote themselves to the manufacture of papier-maché sheeting, which consists of various mixtures of recycled machine and handmade papers, pure fiber kōzo and/or mitsumata, and chemical pulp. The gray sheets are dried on the grass for softness. It is amazing that such paper is still made by hand, with care and pride, as I have seen in Yamanashi and Saitama prefectures.

Different areas of the country or even towns have their own styles of Daruma. Gunma Prefecture and the Sendai area produce the most commonly seen, the eyeless Daruma of good fortune. When purchased, a wish is made and one black eye painted in the belief that a one-eyed Daruma will intercede for the owner in order to get another eye. When the wish is fulfilled or success comes, the other eye is painted in. This Daruma is a favorite good luck charm, used particularly by politicians during elections and by new business owners.

At the end of every year in preparation for the New Year, which is considered an auspicious time for wishing, a Daruma market-fair is held north of Tokyo. This tradi-
tional market, carried on for several centuries, attracts people from near and far, who come to sell and buy Daruma from thumbnail size to some so large they must be carted home by pickup truck.

_Koyori and Mizuhiki_

The origins of _koyori_, twisted paper string, and _mizuhiki_, the more elaborate paper cord moistened and twisted on a frame, are not well known, although scholars agree that the processes behind them are quite old. It is probable that they developed about the same time as, or just prior to, the invention of _shifu_ around 1600, since the ideas and techniques involved are essentially the same.

_Koyori_ string is made from a narrow sheet of paper held by one corner and rolled on a flat surface or twisted by hand to form a strong cord. Or, a paper sheet may be cut into one long continuous strip and spun in the same manner as _shifu_ is made. People wove _koyori_ into thousands of useful shapes. By lightly pasting the cord over a mold, or by weaving it into basketwork shapes and heavily lacquering them, the Japanese created an innumerable variety of useful objects—bags, gunpowder and water flasks, hats, baskets, tobacco pouches, sake cups, purses, boxes, and even more ingeniously created items. The lacquered _koyori_ wares are both inflexible and waterproof. Many old examples can be seen today at the Oji Paper Museum in Tokyo, and some can still be obtained in antique shops and markets.

_Mizuhiki_, although quite similar to _koyori_, is finer cord manufactured by a rather more elaborate technique. A narrow sheet of paper is twisted diagonally from one corner, plunged into water quickly, twisted more and stretched either on a frame or a wheel; or it is fastened to a vertical pole and twisted and stretched horizontally outdoors, rather like a clothes line. There it dries tightly in the sun. _Mizuhiki_ were for centuries used as elaborately twisted hair ties for both sexes until shorter hair styles became popular. Today _mizuhiki_ are commonly used for wrapping and decorating gifts, with very intricate rules attached to the etiquette of their colors and the methods of tying them.

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Lacquered Papier-Maché (Ikkanbashi)

LACQUERED objects formed from twisted and woven paper string (koyori) have been made in Japan for centuries. Lacquered papier-maché items may have a longer history, but are considerably rarer. Usually, layers of sheet paper were applied over a mold, and the finished form was then lacquered. Most frequently made were boxes, trays, and containers of various kinds. Pure fiber pulp was used to form such objects as well. The term Ikkanbashi comes from the name of Hirai Ikkan (1578–1657), a Chinese lacquer craftsman who immigrated to Japan and was patronized by the Tea master Sen Sōtan. It is probable that lacquered paper objects were made in Japan before this time, but little research has been done in this field yet. Paper objects—lacquered, oiled, and plain—were made from early times in great variety (including furniture) in Korea. A scrutiny of the history of paper objects of both Japan and Korea might yield some important insights into this neglected craft. In the late nineteenth century and early decades of the twentieth, kitsch and cheap objects were also made of lacquered paper, both for export and domestic consumption.

Notes

1. Until 1966, the Japanese dharmâni were considered the world’s first printed texts. However, a Korean dharmâni sealed into a stupa in 751 was found at Pulguk-sa temple in Kyōngju, and this is now the oldest known example of printing.
5. Munemichi Yanagi, “Creative Art from Paper,” This is Japan 18.